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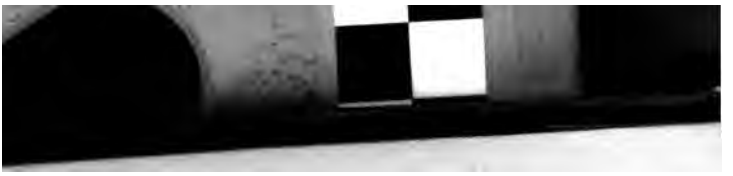








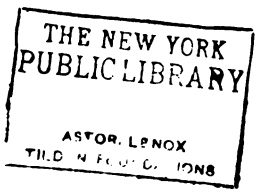






IN THE SERVICE OF THE PRINCESS




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"Glancing back . . . she saw that the Turkish officer was gradually gaining"

(page 233)

IN THE SERVICE OF THE PRINCESS

By

HENRY C. ROWLAND

Author of "Sea Scamps,"
"The Countess Diane," etc.

Frontispiece in colour by
JOHN RAE



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CHAPTER I

Dick and the Princess met when both were in the bud. On that occasion Dick rendered her the first chivalrous service which she had ever received, not as a princess, but as a woman.

It was in Switzerland. Dick was returning from one of his long, solitary rambles, for his mother was an invalid and the boy knew no one in the place. Approaching the auberge from the rear he heard the hideous squawking which a fowl makes when seized with violence and for a sinister purpose. Boy-like, Dick hastened to the scene of execution.

A stolid Swiss gripped firmly the sacrifice to man's savage appetites; he forced the beak open, pushed the scissors under the tongue and cut, then looked at the boy and grinned. Dick, realising the stern necessities of the case, watched the death throes with the cool interest of a savage, or a boy, and was still watching when a slim figure in a grey riding habit came flying around the corner of the building and stumbled over the shuddering body of the chicken.

"Look out!" called Dick, sharply.

A slender little girl with smoke-coloured hair and very light grey eyes, stopped short and looked at him in a startled way. The corpse heaved convulsively and she glanced down.

"V'at iss t'at t'ing?" she asked, in strongly accented English.

"Chicken," said Dick. "Better keep away; he might spatter you."

The girl did not move and Dick stared, fascinated by the growing horror in her face. The peasant had caught another victim and was forcing open its beak.

Then suddenly she understood, which was odd, for she came from a country where a person would take a troublesome insect and, holding it gently, place it upon the ground at a distance, rather than to kill it. Yet she understood, and Dick still staring, saw the rich colour fade from her cheeks, leaving them a pale olive, while her light eyes seemed to grow suddenly dark.

The Swiss raised his sharp scissors; as he did so the girl sprang forward.

"*Non! non! non! ne faites pas c'la!*" she cried in a deep, gurgling voice. The peasant stared, then grinned, and made the fatal snip. The fowl squawked, and at the same instant the girl flew at the man like a wild-cat and lashed him across the head with her riding-whip. Then, as with a howl of pain and astonishment he dropped fowl and scissors, raising both hands to shield himself, she struck him again and again, keen, cruel blows, so maddening the fellow that he lurched toward her snarling in his throat and with his thick fingers spread.

But Dick had already sprung forward to inter-

fere; he saw the danger in the man's blind fury, and, big-boned, strong-muscled boy that he was, planted a blow between the eyes that sent him to earth, quite hors-de-combat.

Dick caught the girl's wrist and disarmed her, none too gently.

"That's enough!" said he, "you leave him alone!"

She flung herself forward; to Dick she looked all eyes and hair and white, flashing teeth.

"How do you dar're?" she panted. "Gif me t'at v'ip!" she positively hissed at him like a cat. "How do you dar're to touch me? I am the Princess Lilear!"

"I don't care if you're the Queen of England," said Dick. "You've got no right to slash a man like that for doing what he's told." He held the whip behind him.

The girl stared; then she looked at the peasant who was sitting on the ground blubbering. A swift change passed over her face; a change which startled Dick even more than her outburst of rage.

"V'y vas he doing t'at? V'y? *V'y? V'y?*" she cried imperiously.

"Well," said Dick, "you can't eat 'em alive, can you? Here—take your whip!" He saw the reaction coming.

But the princess did not seem to see the whip; her eyes were fastened on Dick with a look of horrified intensity.

"Eat t'em!" she cried. "Iss it to eat t'em?" The look of horror gave way to one of infinite loathing. "I know!" she cried, as if to challenge contradiction. "I know—but I have never t'ought —Oh, *tchk, tchk, tchk!*" She made the peculiar clicking sound by which the Turks express emotion. The blood rushed into her face. Dick could see that an outburst of some sort was coming.

"Don't cry," he said uncomfortably. "It's beastly, of course, but it's always done; doesn't hurt 'em; it's over so quick; and they're used to it—sort of."

She was not listening. Another lightning change had occurred and she sprang to the side of the peasant, who shrank away.

"*V'là!*" she cried. "You are an animal—they are all animals—but it v'as not your fault! I am sorry t'at I beated you! *V'là!*"

She had drawn a little purse from the pocket of her skirt and was pouring the contents between the man's knees. Dick saw gold coins, louis, ten-franc pieces, and a stream of silver.

"Don't give him all that!" he protested.

The princess turned to him haughtily.

"I v'ill gif him v'at I like!" she exclaimed. "I am the Princess Lilear!"

"Well, you may be the Princess Lilear, but you're an awful little goose!" Dick regarded her pityingly, then turned away.

The princess looked at him aslant.

"V'at iss your name?" she asked, and something in the low, rich voice brought the colour into the boy's cheeks.

"Dick—I mean, Richard Osborne," he answered stiffly.

The princess stepped to his side; her light-coloured eyes were intently studying his face.

"Dick Osborne," she said, in a silky little voice. "Dick is nicer t'an Richard. You are English."

"No; I'm American."

"It iss the same t'ing. You look the same, and talk the same, and act the same!" She glanced around at the peasant who was staring from her to the money in his hand. From the man she looked at the headless fowl, and shuddered.

"Come on away," said Dick. She did not move, and the boy, who was a head taller, took her arm and drew her along with him. A little tremor passed through the princess; her eyes flashed up at Dick's face, caught the cool, matter-of-fact expression, and fell to the path. She made no effort to draw away. Still holding her arm, Dick led her to the arbour. Half-way down the path the princess slipped gently from his grasp. Dick did not notice it; he was interested in a bunch of grapes overhead and wondering if they might not be edible, although scarcely ripe.

"Do you like grapes?" he asked.

"No!" said the princess petulantly.

Dick glanced at her in surprise.

"Well, you don't have to eat them," said he.

The princess frowned, then pointed to the back of his hand.

"Your hand iss cut!"

Dick glanced at it indifferently.

"Must have scratched my knuckles on his cap. It's nothing."

The princess was silent. Dick tried the grapes and found them almost ripe enough to eat.

"You safed me from being hurted," said the princess slowly. "The man was mad like a bull. He would haf hurted me."

"That's because you made him crazy, slashing him like that."

The princess regarded him from the corner of her eyes.

"Do you like best to fight?" she asked, and added: "Or to eat unripe grapes?"

"I don't mind fightin'," answered the boy, "if you've got something to fight about."

"You should be a soldier."

"That's what I am going to be. Next year I am going to West Point. That's our military college. I'm studyin' now with a tutor. It will be easier for me 'cause I've always known French and German and Italian." He broke off to climb after a fresh bunch of grapes. "These are riper—want some?"

"No," said the princess shortly. Her light eyes followed every movement of the boy, but not directly;

there was a faint flush under her clear, olive skin.

"Are you glad you—you safed me from being hurted?" she asked, almost shyly.

Something in her voice caught Dick's attention. He turned slowly, a large purple grape between his lips. His eyes met those of the princess. She slipped off her glove and held out her hand.

"I t'ank you," she said, almost faintly.

Dick took the small hand in his and shook it awkwardly, then dropped it. But his eyes were still held by some strange power in those of the princess.

"Oh, that was nothing," he said, in a voice of puzzled embarrassment, for a hot glow had appeared in the princess' cheeks and she was looking at him strangely.

"Do you not v'vish to kiss my hand?"

Dick's eyes opened wide; he felt the blood pouring into his face; the princess saw it and her own cheeks grew crimson. Suddenly the boy reached for the princess' hand, and his blue eyes began to gleam. The girl looked at him, frightened and fascinated.

"American men don't kiss girl's hands," said he. "If there's any kissin' to be done it's on the lips." And before the princess knew what was going to happen she found her slender body clasped in the boy's strong arms and a pair of firm and very grapey lips pressed against her own. The next moment she was free and stood breathing hard, her

face quite pale and a purple stain at the corner of her mouth. Dick glanced at her and laughed.

"Better wipe your lips!" said he. "It's a give-away!"

The princess tried to speak, failed, tried again with the same result. Suddenly she turned, fled down the arbour, and disappeared in the foliage beyond.

"Funny things, girls," thought Dick, and reached up one long arm for a large and almost luscious bunch of grapes.

CHAPTER II

THIRTEEN years later, sailing from Marseilles for the Levant on a steamer of the Messageries, Dick found himself face to face with an old acquaintance; this was a handsome, elderly man of military bearing and markedly Oriental type.

"How do you do, General Kostovo?" said Dick, in French.

The other man turned with an almost alarming suddenness. When he saw who had spoken his face cleared and he sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"My old friend and comrade in arms, Osborne Pasha!" he cried, embracing Dick in the French manner. "And how have you been all of these months, and where? And is your wound quite healed? The last time that I saw you was at Batchak, where we were busy killing bandits for Abd-ul-Hamid!"

"I've been in Morocco, and I'm quite fit, thanks. And you?"

General Kostovo's keen eyes were watching him intently from under their grey, bushy brows. He ignored Dick's question.

"Yes, we were very busy with those bandits, were we not? *Tchk, tchk!* The sultan's methods were wrong! They make them there faster than we could

kill them. As you said at the time, he should have set them to killing each other, but that would have thrown us out of employment! *Tchk, tchk!*" He laughed. "And where are you bound for now?"

Dick laughed, then lowered his voice.

"You will have a shock when I tell you. I am bound for Podoni, en route for Karamania."

"And what," said General Kostovo, "do you propose doing there? Excuse me for asking, but that, you know, is my country."

"I know it very well. I am going there to offer my sword to the Princess Lilear."

"Sh'sh'sh!" Kostovo looked quickly around him. "Come over here."

He led Dick to the rail. The vessel was under way and the French coast was looming astern, its rugged outlines sharp and clearly cut and hard against a sky which seemed devoid of all trace of atmosphere. Dick glancing at it saw that they might expect the mistral before morning.

"And why," asked Kostovo, "do you think that the Princess Lilear has need of your sword at this particular moment?"

"Hamdi Pasha has been buying arms. I know what that means; that what you hinted at two years ago is due to happen very soon. So here I am. Is the princess with you?"

"Yes. I have been to fetch her from England. She has been living there—too long! She is more English than Karamanian. We are travelling in-

cognito to guard against all danger to her from Hamdi's agents. We shall disembark at Podoni where an escort of our troopers will meet us to conduct us to Istria. But even yet I do not understand. Why do you wish to enter our service?"

"I'm out of 'work' and this promises to be interesting. Besides that, I like your people, and I've got a grudge against the Ottoman Empire! But if you take me I shall want to run the whole show."

"Have you met my niece?" asked Kostovo.

"The princess and I have met but once; that was many years ago in Switzerland. She was thrashing a peasant for killing a hen."

"She would do the same to-day! That is part of our faith. We do not kill things."

"It is a good faith," said Dick drily, "but please excuse me for doubting that you are a shining example of it—after Macedonia!"

Both men laughed; Dick, glancing down the deck, saw a slender, graceful figure leaning on the rail.

"We can talk business later," said he. "With your permission I will speak to the Princess Lilear."

"Perfectly."

They walked down the deck. The princess looked up, and Dick wondered at the very slight change from the child whom he remembered. Her figure was matured, of course, its curves fuller and more womanly, but the intense, light-coloured eyes, the clear olive skin with its ruddy undertone, and the smoky hair were all the same. He bowed.

"How do you do, Osborne Pasha," said the princess, offering her hand. Dick observed that the low-pitched voice had the rich note which he had never quite forgotten.

"I did not think that you would remember me," said he.

"You have not changed. Except for your beard and moustache, you look precisely as you did——" the colour tinted her clear skin—"in Switzerland, so many years ago!"

"Osborne and I are old comrades," said Kostovo. "We fought—or perhaps I should say, hunted—shoulder to shoulder in Macedonia."

"I have heard of you from time to time," said the princess, looking at Dick. "You have always been fighting somewhere."

"That's my work."

"And now," said Kostovo, "Osborne Pasha wishes to espouse the cause of Karamania."

The princess looked quickly at Dick; her eyes rested upon him thoughtfully.

"Do you so much enjoy fighting?" she asked.

"Sometimes; but that's not it. One need not be bloodthirsty to be a soldier."

Kostovo began to tell an experience of their campaign. Dick leaned both elbows on the rail and listened. The princess, her shoulder against a stanchion, studied Dick through half-veiled eyes. Every detail of him bespoke the soldier, the young but veteran campaigner. Hardship and responsibility

had lent ten years to his apparent age; perhaps to his actual age. Physically, he was a scant six feet with heavy bones and tough, lean muscles. Extremes of climate had already left their imprint on his clean-cut face and drawn fine lines at the corners of his clear, grey eyes. Yet there was much of the boy whom she so well remembered, especially about the mouth and the lower part of a face which might have been too severe without the fair moustache and closely trimmed beard.

At dinner, Dick had an opportunity to observe the princess, who sat opposite. The steamer was one of the commercial boats of the line, and there were but three other passengers, Levantines, who were placed at another table. Dick, a trained observer, glanced seldom at the princess. She was a very lovely woman, he reflected without emotion; her face held more than mere beauty; it had intensity, temperament and strength of will. The rich tone of colour under the long, light-coloured eyes showed civil strife; there were also a few fine lines at the corners of her mouth, the upper lip of which was slightly aslant and inclined to quiver in the middle during her speech or even at some passing emotion. Such a mouth, Dick thought, belonged less to a queen than to an actress; but perhaps the princess could play both rôles. At any rate, the mouth itself looked as if it were meant to laugh—or kiss; and the princess did not look as if she ever did either.

After dinner General Kostovo asked Dick to take coffee with him.

"You speak Turkish," he said, lighting a cigarette. "I remember you spoke it at Batchak. You would have no difficulty with our Karamanian tongue, which is much the same."

"And yet your people are distinctly different."

Kostovo nodded absently.

"Karamania's hour has struck," said he. "Turkey has gangrene, only it is the part cut off which heals. When the present sultan came upon the throne she had lost Bosnia, Bulgaria and Montenegro. Servia and Roumania were independent. Russia has taken back the slice of Bessarabia which she lost in 1856 and held to what she grabbed in Asia—Kars, Batoum and Ardahan. England has been given the island of Cypress, and Thessaly has gone to Greece. Europe, and especially England, who has lost her footing at the Porte, expects and hopes to see within a short time the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Hark my words!" He waved his cigarette impressively. "Old as I am, I expect to live to hear a Christian mass said in Agia Sophia and to see the Moslem paint washed from the figures of its Byzantine mosaics!"

"Islam," said Dick, flippantly, "is on the toboggan!"

"And Turkey is rotten to the core; why should Karamania rot with it? On the other hand, we will not submit to Grecian rule, nor would it be a

good business proposition for Greece to impose it. Besides," he grinned, "that would bring down the wrath of the Powers, who, between you and me, are very sore over the results of their meddling in Macedonia. Nothing would please them more"—he waved his cigarette—"than to see Karamania assert her independence under a proper newly-formed dynasty!"

Dick tugged at his moustache.

"How about the Porte?" he asked.

"The sultan is sick of us! We have dragged him into altercation, cost him large sums of money, and brought him no revenues."

"Then," said Dick, slowly, "the trouble is—Hamdi Pasha."

"Exactly. Hamdi Pasha was recalled from Paris for being unorthodox and suspected of being involved with the Young Turkish Party. Then he got himself appointed governor general of Karamania. Before he had been there long the Porte recalled him, when he flatly refused to budge. As soon as I learned that he had taken over the Turkish garrison into his own service and paid them their six months arrears of pay, I saw what was in the wind."

Dick whistled softly. Kostovo leaned toward him and dropped his voice.

"But I was not taken unprepared. For months past I had been organising a regiment of light cavalry, Akindschis, and with the sheiks had been

drilling them by separate troops, back in the hills. Hamdi knows of their existence, but he does not know"—Kostovo whispered—"that we have a full thousand of the best mounted, best armed, and best fighting troopers that the world has ever seen!"

Dick looked up questioningly.

"I am not exaggerating. We Karamanians are a fighting stock, and our horses, as you know, are famous the world over. My men are armed with modern weapons, carbines and revolvers. The days of steel are past; of course, they have their yataghans to fall back on in a pinch. Besides the Akindschis, we have now recruited six hundred Sepahis, a full regiment of infantry; and I have several tons of arms and ammunition in the hold of this vessel!"

"There's some fun ahead for brother Hamdi!" said Dick.

General Kostovo snapped his fingers. "I do not give that for Hamdi. Hamdi is whipped before we start. The trouble is—starting!"

Dick raised his eyebrows. "Wheels within wheels?" he asked.

"Precisely. The Karamanians, as you know, owe their hereditary allegiance to the Princess Lilear, and they would fight for her to the last man, but for one thing. She is unmarried!"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"The sheiks refuse to crown an unmarried woman as Queen of Karamania; they claim that as long as

she is unmarried she is a menace. You see, they are afraid of some alliance with one of our more powerful neighbours. On the other hand, they will not acknowledge fealty to anybody but the princess."

"Then marry her."

"As soon as I discovered that Hamdi was at work," Kostovo continued, "I went at once to England to fetch the princess. Now that I have got her, she is of no use without a husband! *Tchk, tchk!*" He rapped his hands together in vexation. "Previously I had tried all over Europe to make a match for her, but as she is not yet recognised as royalty herself she cannot marry royalty."

"Must she marry royalty?"

"I am not so sure. The main thing is to get her safely married."

"But how about the princess—her own feelings, I mean?"

"*Tchk!* She will do as she is told." Kostovo's tone was indifferent. "She is patriotic; she will make any personal sacrifice." He turned to Dick. "Do you know the Grand Duke Michael of Salzburg?"

"That pestiferous rake who hangs around Nice and Monte Carlo?"

Kostovo shrugged. "He is a royal duke. He saw the princess at Nice and became infatuated. He is enormously rich and a widower."

"He is said to have killed his wife by his brutality!"

"*On dit—on dit!* Do you know, I am half tempted to send him a wire? I believe he would marry the princess to-morrow. Of course, the marriage would be morganatic until she was crowned, but that should be soon."

Dick was silent for a moment, then he said slowly:

"But knowing what you do of him, would you marry her to such a man?"

"Why not? She might fancy him. Many women have, I understand. Besides, the princess is quite able to take care of herself; she could keep him at arm's length if she chose."

"For how long? Such a brute! He locked one of his grooms in a box-stall and set the straw on fire."

"The princess could handle him," said Kostovo, doggedly. "She has peculiar ideas of her own on matrimony. While willing to take a consort she insists that her marriage——" he glanced slyly at Dick and grinned—"shall only be such in name."

Dick softly blew out his breath.

"How about the question of an heir?" he asked.

"*Tchk!* I have never dared suggest anything so indelicate. I do not understand her at all. She has never shown the slightest interest in men—or a man. Once when I questioned her she flew into a passion, and said that she had never seen but one person whom she would marry, and that as there was no possibility of marrying him she would never

marry at all. That was years ago, when she was little more than a child."

"And yet you would marry her to this brute!"

"It is not a matter of choice," said Kostovo impatiently. "We have come to a crisis. This is no time to go husband-hunting. Hamdi has taken advantage of my absence to push matters to a climax. What is one to do? If you can suggest any better means I should be glad to hear of it!"

For a few moments Dick smoked meditatively. Kostovo played with the string of prayer-beads which, although far from being a "true believer," he carried Turklike as a pocket toy. Presently Dick flicked his cigar into the scuppers.

"Why not give it out to your sheiks," he began slowly, "that a desirable match has been contracted for the princess upon the condition of her being throned. Pledge your Divan to secrecy; then give them any name you choose—the name of some actual royalty! Afterwards, to convince them and to furnish a figure-head, marry the princess then and there by proxy to this sham husband."

"What is that? Marry her by proxy?"

"Perfectly. Give them something to fasten to. Bluff 'em, man, lie to them. What are they, anyway, but a lot of simple-minded hillmen? Marry the princess by proxy and show them the proxy!"

The general found it difficult to speak.

"But that is—*tchk, tchk, tchk!* But the proxy?"

"What about the proxy? The proxy doesn't

matter—*that!*" Dick snapped his fingers. "He's a sham. He is married as a matter of form to represent some other person; consequently he is not married himself at all. He is nothing; or, he is 'x,' the unknown quantity!"

"But—but—who could be proxy?"

"Anybody whom you can trust. Marry her to anybody—to me, if you like!"

"To *you!*"

"Well, since it's all a sham it doesn't matter. I would do as well as anybody else. Better, perhaps. You could give it out that I had been sent out from —say England, for the purpose."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, my royal master can repudiate his contract; and you can get some real person. With the princess throned that would be easy enough."

General Kostovo was mute. Presently he clapped his hands, and his servant appeared.

"Coffee," said the general. He turned to Dick. "This is an extraordinary suggestion. It requires thought."

"Yes, think it over." Dick dropped his voice. "You spoke about some arms and ammunition down below."

"Yes; I have practically our supplies for the whole campaign, which should not be a long one. The steamer stops for a day and a half at Saros, just this side of Podoni; I shall send a courier from there with a message to Colonel Razamachi Bey, of

the Akindschis; he will be at Podoni with a troop when we arrive." He chuckled. "*Tchk, tchk!* The stuff will be in an *araba* train and across to Istria before Hamdi knows that we are in the country!"

"Unless," said Dick, "he knows that it is coming."

"No, no! There is no chance of that. It came through Mallock & Co., of New York, as agricultural machinery, and was transhipped in bond at Marseilles."

"Then it ought to be all right. I have never known Mallock to slip up."

"As soon as it is landed," said Kostovo, with a grin, "my troop of Akindschis will pass it through the custom-house, load it into the *arabas*, which will be ready, and start immediately for the interior. Nothing could be simpler."

Before long they separated for the night. The princess had already retired, and Dick did not see her until the following afternoon. As he was standing by the rail watching the gambols of a school of porpoises she came on deck, and his first glance at her face showed him that something had gone wrong. He had already observed that when under the influence of any emotion the light-coloured eyes of the princess became curiously intent, and, as if conscious of this and wishing to minimise the startling effect produced, she had a habit of half-lowering the lids and scrutinising one through the double fringe of long, black lashes.

When abreast of Dick the princess stopped. Dick bowed.

"I wish to speak with you, Osborne Pasha," she said, acknowledging his bow with a cool nod.

"I am at your service. Can I get you a chair?"

"No, thank you." The colour began to glow through the princess' cheeks. "General Kostovo," said she, "has just told me of your suggestion for satisfying the sheiks in regard to my marriage. He seemed to think that it was a very clever plan."

"What do *you* think?"

"*I* think that it is deceitful, undignified and absurd! Moreover, I will never consent to it."

"Then," said Dick, calmly, "we will have to give it up."

The princess regarded him fixedly; a pale gleam shone from between her very dark eyelashes. Her colour deepened to a ruddy olive.

"I could scarcely believe," said she, "that you meant it seriously."

"I surely did. 'It's a mighty serious matter to me."

"Indeed?"

"Well, rather! I offered to be the proxy!"

The pretty mouth of the princess grew vicious in expression.

"It is precisely the sort of plan," said she, "that one might expect from a professional—fighter!"

Dick did not answer.

"Any personal sacrifice which I might be asked

to make," pursued the princess bitterly, "would be preferable to such cheap trickery."

"Very well. Go ahead and make it. Tell Kostovo to send for the Grand Duke Michael."

"For whom?"

"The Grand Duke Michael. That's the consort he had picked for you. He really would answer the purpose better, if it's all the same to you. I don't care."

The large eyes of the princess opened very wide. Dick did not notice her; he was watching the water clinging in little swirls to the rough side of the vessel. The princess walked somewhat unsteadily to the rail and stood, half turned from him. Presently he looked at her and, observing the droop of the pretty shoulders and the tense position of the small hand as it gripped an iron stanchion, the angry colour faded from his face.

The princess turned slowly.

"Then it was to save me from that," she asked, "that you suggested this other plan?"

"Yes. From that, or something like it."

"You were acting as my friend?"

"Trying to."

"That was good of you—to be my friend."

"I thought you needed one; you've got several thousand fighting-men swearing allegiance to you, and not a single friend, so far as I can find out."

The princess looked at him fixedly.

"I am sorry I hurt you," said she.

"You didn't; I'm not easily hurt."

"I think," said the princess softly, "that it would not be difficult to hurt you."

Dick flushed. The princess studied him curiously.

"You have not had much to do with women, Osborne Pasha," said she.

"That's true."

"You don't know much about them."

"Say 'nothing' and you'll hit closer. I don't need to in my work."

"Do you like such work?" asked the princess.

"I don't know; I don't mind fightin', when you've got something decent to fight about."

The words rang in her ears like an echo; there came the swift picture of a vine-covered arbour with the warm Swiss sunlight filtering through in yellow bands. She saw a strongly-framed boy looking at her with a gleam in his blue-grey eyes, and felt a pair of muscular young arms around her shoulders, while two firm, grapey lips were crushed against her own. The blood rushed into her face and she turned away in sudden confusion.

When she looked at him again Dick was resting both elbows on the rail, staring out across the sea. The princess stole a glance at his keen, rugged face. It showed no emotion of any kind; in fact, there was nothing in it to indicate that he was conscious of her presence. She wondered if a man who looked like that could really feel, and a sudden curiosity prompted a quick, thoughtless question.

"Have you ever been in love?" she asked, and then would have bitten her tongue off to have left the words unsaid.

"Yes," answered Dick, without looking around. "Have you?"

"I—I think so," stammered the princess.

Dick laughed, as if the absurdity of the question had suddenly struck him. He turned sharply and looked at her with a quick, keen scrutiny, and the princess felt as if she were at most not more than ten years old and made of some transparent material. Dick noticed her confusion and laughed more heartily.

"You're a funny girl," he said, with utter naturalness, and the princess felt instantly at her ease.

"And I think that you are only a big, rough boy," she answered, almost shyly.

Dick wrinkled his forehead.

"See here; I came into this thing to fight your army and look after your soldiers and all that. Now I see that I've got to take care of you, too."

"Indeed you have not!"

"Yes I have. There's no one else to do it. So if I'm ever short or emphatic, you're not to mind—d'ye see?"

"But I shall mind. I shall very much mind."

"Oh, well, then we'll be scrappin' all the time, I s'pose," he growled. "Anyway, you're to know that it's all for your own good. D'you under-

stand?" He laid one big-boned hand on the princess' arm, and looked at her sternly.

"I—I—yes, I think so," stammered the princess. "Hush! Here comes my uncle!"

"Oh, hang your uncle," snapped Dick. "I'm not in his service; I'm in yours."

CHAPTER III

THE voyage to Podoni passed without incident. When they landed at the quaint, picturesque little port Kostovo learned to his dismay that there was no sign of his cavalry escort.

"Nothing could be more annoying," he exclaimed to Dick that evening as they were taking coffee on the terrace in front of the little hotel. "There is my precious ammunition down in the custom-house entirely unguarded! I shall not sleep a wink! I would stand guard myself, but for arousing suspicion!"

Dick also was anxious. The arms and ammunition represented the key which was to unlock the country for the princess. By midnight, finding sleep impossible, he slipped on some clothes, and stepping quietly out of his room which opened on the terrace, took the path which led to the harbour.

The night was very still, starlit but without a moon. Reaching the quay a short walk brought him to the custom-house. The building itself was of the type peculiar to such structures in all the little ports of the world; oblong, built of stone and cement, with barred windows and iron shutters.

At the corner of the building he stood for a moment, listening. There was not a sound. He was



about to return to the hotel when his eye was caught by a black object moving along the quay from the opposite direction. A moment later and it was outlined against the sheen of water on the bay, when he discovered the figures of three men, two of whom were carrying between them a bulky object. Not wishing to be seen, he slipped around the corner of the building and waited.

To his surprise the three men walked quickly up to the front of the custom-house. One of them drew a key from his pocket and opened the door, when the other two entered, carrying between them what Dick took to be a good-sized jug. The sight of this object explained the whole performance.

"Custom-house officials come down to steal a jug of bonded brandy," he thought.

The idea of interference never occurred to him. It was not his brandy. The last thing which he desired was to excite the suspicion of their being anything within which might warrant a watch being kept on the building. Moreover, he knew the corruption to be expected of Oriental officialdom, and found nothing unusual in the pilfering of a tithe of the goods committed to its care.

A few minutes later the two men came out and hurried away. The third man quickly closed the iron door, locked it, then stood for a moment with the key in his hand, apparently listening.

"Something has frightened them," thought Dick, and looked warily about.

Nothing stirred. The only noise was the soft lapping of the waves upon the beach. Puzzled, and for the first time suspicious, he looked back at the watcher by the door.

Suddenly the man turned, lifted his arm, and threw the key far out into the water. Dick heard the splash and a fearful doubt rushed into his brain. In three leaps he reached the man, gripped him by the throat and flung him against the side of the building. As the dim starlight fell upon the pallid face Dick recognised one of the three Levantines who had come from Marseilles on his steamer.

"Swine!" he snarled in French. "What are you doing here?"

There was no need to ask. The heavy petroleum smoke was already oozing from the crevices of the iron shutters; within there was a dull roaring sound, mingled with the sharp crackling of burning wood.

Dick threw the man aside, grabbed the latch of the door and shook it violently, but it was of iron and as solid as the gate of a prison. One after the other he tried the window shutters, but they, too, were strong and unyielding. He was hammering at one of them with his heel when there came the crash of an explosion and a dense cloud of ruddy smoke eddied from a crevice in the roof.

Realising sombrely that all was lost, and not wishing to be seen loitering about the place, Dick hurried back to the hotel. As he reached the terrace there was the roar of another explosion and a

tongue of flame in a multitude of sparks leaped high into the air. A rattling volley of smaller reports followed, and with this the town suddenly awoke. Shouts and cries and the sound of hurrying feet arose from all about.

Dick was watching the conflagration from his window when there came the noise of someone beating violently on his door. He threw it open and Kostovo burst into the room. The man was frantic with rage and despair.

"You see!" he shrieked. "It is the custom-house! It is the custom-house!"

"I know it. Don't make so much noise!" Dick slammed the door shut.

"But it is the custom-house! My ammunition! My arms and ammunition!" Kostovo rushed up and down the room, raving.

"Be quiet, will you?" said Dick fiercely. "The whole thing's a plot. We've been sold out. Keep still a minute and I'll tell you about it. Hamdi means to nip us in the bud."

"Hamdi! Pig of a Turk! But how could he know? How? How?" Kostovo stopped short and glared at Dick.

"Because he's a strategist. Because he's never had his eye off you since you left, I suppose. The man's a fox; he doesn't want to fight; he'd rather outwit you."

Kostovo burst into tears. For a moment Dick really pitied him.

"Come out of doors," said he. "It isn't safe to talk here."

He led the general out upon the terrace where they found the princess, watching the fire.

"It is the custom-house," she said in a trembling voice.

"Yes," said Dick. "The Kingdom of Karamania has lost the first round. But the fight is not yet over."

"We can't fight with empty guns," groaned Kostovo.

"You've still got the bayonet."

Kostovo ignored the remark.

"*Mash Allah!*" he wailed. "This will cut down the Akindschis carbine-cartridges to scarcely enough for one pitched battle! It will reduce the muster of the Sepahis to four hundred men, with scant ammunition for a single day's fighting, and our infantry will have to fall back on the rusty old weapons which we had discarded." The tears gushed from his eyes. "That pig of a Razamachi! Why was he not here on time with his troop, as ordered?"

"Don't blame him; it's all of the same piece. Your courier never reached Istria. I'll bet he's at the bottom of some gully with a bullet through his head."

"And you think that the burning of the custom-house——"

"That was Hamdi's work. I had the disgrace of

seeing it done." In a few brief words he told his story.

Kostovo threw his hands above his head with a gesture of despair.

"Then those Levantines were Hamdi's spies! We are beaten at the start!"

"Better at the start than at the finish," said Dick.

"The finish! The finish is here! Or rather, it is there!" Kostovo pointed toward the lurid blaze.

"No, it's not. It's a long way off—for us. You'll see!"

"Of course," said the princess, with a bitter irony, "the loss of the ammunition is nothing. We still have Osborne Pasha."

"Before we can get any more," groaned Kostovo, "Hamdi will hold Karamania. To think that you should have stood there and watched them set the place a-fire!"

"But there were three of them," said the princess, raising her chin, "and Osborne Pasha was unarmed. When two of them went away it was too late!"

Dick bit his lip to keep back an answer.

"And you never guessed what they were up to?" snapped Kostovo. "Not even when they came out without the jug?"

"I must have been asleep. Or else, as the princess intimates, it may have been—discretion."

"I did not mean that, exactly, but I am *so* disappointed!" The princess choked back a sob.

"It is all over," groaned Kostovo. "It is the end."

"Poor Karamania!"

"And that descendent of ten thousand reputationless odalisks, Hamdi——"

There was another long silence while the flames licked higher, and the sparks flung violently upward by succeeding minor explosions mounted straight into the still, lurid sky. The glare was reflected crimsonly from the faces of the princess and General Kostovo as they stood and watched their proud ambitions ascending in clouds of flame-flecked smoke.

"Perhaps," said the princess, with a touch of asperity, "Osborne Pasha has still some strategic counsel to offer."

Dick did not answer.

"Have you?" asked Kostovo.

"Yes."

"Indeed? Then why don't you offer it?" asked the princess.

"I'm waiting."

"For what?"

"For you and your uncle to have your cry out."

"What is that?"

"For you to stop cry-babying. You two intimate that I've lost your ammunition. Perhaps I have; but you've lost what we need even more for this work, and that is *sand!* Hamdi outwits you and you sit down and cry. We have got a facer,

but we're not finished by a long shot. At least, I'm not!"

"It's easy to talk," snapped the princess.

"You have nothing to lose," growled Kostovo.

"I've got my life." He turned to the princess. "Yes, it's easy to talk and it's easy to blubber. Suppose we stop both and act. We will wait one day for Razamachi; if he doesn't come we'll ride on to Istria without him, and then we'll see what's to be done. We've lost the first round. Very good. Perhaps we may lose the second and the third and the fourth—but it's the one who wins the *last* round who wins the fight!"

Kostovo shrugged. Dick turned to the princess.

"I came to you to offer my services," said he. "Your uncle has already accepted them in your behalf—and Karamania's. Do you?"

The princess was staring at the fire.

"If I do," said she, "what then?"

"Then I will make you Queen of Karamania."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime, I am in command! Do you accept?"

The princess started to speak, then checked herself.

"Do you?" Dick asked crisply.

She drew herself up.

"Yes," she answered.

"And it is understood that I am in command?"

She turned her face toward him, and their eyes

met in a look which held more of a challenge than an offer and acceptance of allegiance.

"You may direct the campaign," she answered, "and my people will obey you; so will I—if I choose."

CHAPTER IV

KARAMANIA is a country of wild, bleak hills, sandy plains and streams which when not dry are torrential. There are forests of pine and oak; the latter bears an edible acorn; and here in the light snows of winter one may find countless tracks of deer, wolf and pig.

Of the inhabitants, there are two classes, the Turkish stock and the pure Karamanian. The latter is a distinct race and appears to form some connection between the Italians and Roumanians. The Karamanians are a swift, warm, impetuous folk, wild and shy at first, then wild and loving or wild and fierce, according to conditions, but always wild.

Up in their hills, for they dwell high amongst the rocks, the wayfarer will hear much laughter and music. Their religion is vague, a relic of some early pantheism with a few Mohammedan principles, or at least enough to make the "true believer" hate them as heretics with a fanatic frenzy not directed toward the self-acknowledged Giaour. Some are disciples of the Vaisee sect of dervishes, who are accused by the other orders of being anti-Mohammedans.

Physically they are a small, strong-muscled peo-

ple, quick of movement. Dark skins and light-coloured eyes constitute a tribal feature.

Karamania has one wealth and industry; the horse. The stock is Arab, crossed with a breed from the plains of Hungary, and it produces animals which are swift and strong, of good size and sure-footed as mountain goats.

The business centre of the country is the town of Karoz, which lies in a swale on the edge of a small river, usually consisting of standing pools. The sole commerce of Karoz is the horse-market, and this is sufficiently celebrated to bring buyers from all parts of Europe and to establish at its centre that peculiar society in which nationality, caste, customs and religion are relegated to the same plane—the democracy of the horse! Also, it brings gold in plenty, and the parasites thereof. In the Grand Hôtel du Cheval d'Or one finds a *cordon bleu*, vintage wines, an ice-plant and electric lights. There is a Jockey Club, built all of native marble, with priceless Turkish rugs and antimacassars covered with Rhodes and Bokhara embroideries.

So the horses, bred in the hills by the swift, warm Karamanians, bring money to the high villages, and of this a tithe has always gone to their feudal overlords, of whom the Princess Lilear was the last descendant. Her ancestral home was at Istria, twenty miles back from Karoz in the hills, and was built within the semi-ruined walls of a Genoese fortress.

As for Karoz itself, the Ottoman has always laid an indolent claim upon so much as contains the town, and kept a sluggish, dirty, unbuttoned Turkish garrison in the old Frankish castle on the river. But no sultan has ever tried to hold the hills, and so their free people have always claimed them for themselves and paid no taxes except the land tithe to their acknowledged hereditary lords.

When Dick awoke at Podoni the first thing to meet his eyes, dazzled by the flood of sunlight on the bay, was a long, white hull, a buff funnel, and a brilliant American yacht ensign which trailed from the taffrail almost into the sea.

"My ubiquitous compatriot," thought he. "I wonder who it is."

He put his glasses on the yacht and read the name, "*Rêveuse.*"

"French boat chartered by some Yank who slaps our flag on her without the slightest right—and the Lord help the man who tries to pull it down! French crew, also, or they'd have their bunting mast-headed two blocks."

A little later, while making a leisurely breakfast on the terrace, the gravel crunched behind him, and a harsh but pleasant voice said almost in his ear:

"Hello, Dick. Where is the fight now?"

Dick wheeled in his chair. Looking down upon him was a young man of uncanny height, most of which was claimed by his legs. His shoulders were

very broad, very thin, and his tanned face was shrewd but pleasant and contained a pair of steely, deep-set eyes.

"Hello, Jim," said Dick. "I was wondering what could have floated in on that Franco-American packet. So it was you! Well, well!" He broke an egg. "Have you breakfasted?"

"Oh, yes, but I will breakfast again, thank you."

"*Garçon!*" said Dick. "Bring a large pot of coffee, four portions of toast, six eggs, and all of the butter you have got."

"Good old Dick," said Jim. He seated himself opposite his friend. "I see you have not forgotten my healthy habits. My steward apparently intends that I shall keep the *Rhamazan*. He starves me all day and gorges me at night. He considers food poisonous before eleven A. M."

"Who is with you?"

"My sister. Of course you have heard the news." Jim began to grin. "Don't make me laugh! you've heard?"

He glanced shrewdly at his friend. Dick had looked up sharply at the mention of the sister; as Jim asked smilingly if he had heard the news his face stiffened and set.

"No," he said shortly.

Jim laughed outright. "*Please* don't make me laugh, old chap, but—it's not what you think. It's about her husband."

"Well?" Dick's face was grim. "What about him?"

Jim chuckled.

"He's dead!"

Dick bounded up in his chair, his face quite pale.

"What *are* you talking about? Are you crazy? Her husband is——"

"Dead! Good and dead! They found him in his rooms at Monte Carlo, dead of—oh, ever so many things. They'd been separated for six months, you know. Edith was aboard the yacht with me at the time."

Dick gave a gulp, and stared at his egg.

"She was really cut up, although she had hated the beggar from the start. I cabled them to have him iced up until——"

"Oh, hold on!"

"Why? I always hated the brute alive, and I don't like him any better dead. Then I cabled to see if his noble family wanted him. It appears that they did—for the first time in his life. Their collection dates back some centuries and they didn't want to spoil the set."

"And Countess von Essingen?"

"Don't call her that! You've always called her Edith, haven't you? Until you fought about something." Jim's eyes rested for a moment shrewdly upon his friend. "She said a few days ago that you were the only person she wanted to see. She is coming ashore presently."

Dick was drumming on the table with his fingers and putting sugar in his coffee. At the fifth lump Jim drawled:

"Like it sweet, don't you, old boy?"

Dick looked at him in a rather dazed way; then the colour glowed through his tanned skin.

"You have such a tactful way of breaking news. Where are you from and what are you doing here."

"I'm from Sardinia; been hunting *moufflon*. Now we're going to visit an old acquaintance who lives somewhere back in those hills. Do you know Hamdi Pasha?"

"You're not going to visit *him!*"

"Why not? He's asked me dozens of times. He tells me that there's the finest hunting—wolf and pig. First we're going to Karoz; I want to see their horses; may pick up some polo ponies."

"But Edith?"

"She's going with me, of course. Hamdi's all right. He's governor general up there."

Dick sighed deeply.

"What made you come here?" he asked, irritably. "Why didn't you go in the usual way?"

"Wanted to see the country. I've been making arrangements for horses and guides. It's perfectly safe; Hamdi told me so. But what are *you* doing here?" His shrewd eyes fastened on his friend. "Trouble in the Balkans?"

"Yes," snapped Dick. "I may as well tell you; of course you'll keep your mouth shut. I've come

here to engineer a campaign against your friend Hamdi, for the independence of Karamania."

Jim's keen eyes opened wide, then his face fell, and he banged the table with a large bony fist.

"Let me in, Dicky; I'd be useful. You're the only man that ever beat me snap-shootin'; and I can trim *you* with a pistol!"

"You'd be useful enough, but it wouldn't do. Besides, you're a friend of Hamdi's."

"Hamdi can go hang!"

"Perhaps he may. Did you notice what he's done to the custom-house?"

"Did he do that?"

Dick nodded. "We had some stuff in there. Look here, do you know the Princess Lilear—Mademoiselle Kostovo, as she is usually called?"

"I've met her. She's pretty."

"I'm in her service."

Jim whistled. "Wish I was. Where is she?"

Dick jerked his head toward the hotel.

"We landed yesterday. Her uncle is bringing her from England. Their escort has not shown up, so we will wait until to-morrow morning and then start anyway. It's a seventy-mile ride; two days, for a woman."

"Let us ride up with you." said Jim.

"All right. But you really can't stop in Karamania. Send the yacht around to Saloniki and go back that way. There's going to be a devil of a row."

Jim looked glum.

"All right. I really couldn't fight against Hamdi, could I? And of course I wouldn't fight against you. Darn it!" He scowled at the table. Suddenly his face cleared.

"Good old bloodthirsty Dick!" He glanced toward the water. "Here comes the launch now, Edith will have a fit. Let's go down. Finished? I'm too excited to eat those three other eggs."

Dick was a shade paler as they walked down to the landing; a moment later the launch slid alongside. A woman in black, who was sitting in the stern, glanced up and all of the colour suddenly left her face.

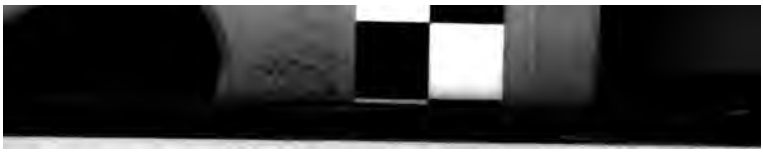
"Dick!" she gasped.

Her brother helped her out. Dick stepped forward.

"I've just heard, Edith," he said.

She gave him her hand without speaking, and as it rested in his Dick looked at her with a rush of some indescribable emotion. A Frenchman had once referred to the Countess von Essingen as "that sophisticated nymph!" and one could find no better commentary. The sweet, pliant charm of her suggested some filtered corner of the greenwood; her laugh seemed to come invisibly through flowering bushes; it hinted at the flash of warm pink against cool green or the tourmaline of a forest pool.

She was a woman with a surplus of high vitality;



a richness of thought and feeling which gave to her delicious personality a liveness too profuse for a mortal. Her laugh alone, low as it was in pitch and volume, never failed to bring stares to the faces of women and blood to the faces of men. She was long of limb, agile, incapable of awkwardness as a pussy cat, and like the pussy cat, which she so much resembled in other ways, possessed of a supple strength which never knew fatigue. Yet no one ever guessed at this strength; contrary to diplomatic rules she betrayed only her weakness. A blind man could have seen the temperament she held, but Machiavelli himself could not have guessed how strongly she held it.

Dick found her unchanged. She told him in a few words of the death of her husband, then passed to other topics.

"Is Karamania interesting, Dick?" she asked.

"If you like horses."

"I do, when properly ridden. How about the people?"

"I will show you two of them in a few minutes."

"Who are they?"

"General Kostovo and his niece. We came on the same steamer from Marseilles. He is an old friend of mine."

"I have met a Karamanian princess; the Princess Lilear. She is very pretty, in a wild, Oriental sort of way."

Dick grinned somewhat ruefully.

"Well, this *is* the Princess Lilear."

"Oh!" Edith's pretty lips made a little circle.

As they were walking up to the hotel she asked: "Who does Karamania belong to, Dick?"

"Turkey claims it."

"Who else?"

"Well, it claims itself."

"And I suppose that some day," Edith looked thoughtfully at the distant mountains, "it may attempt to make good that claim."

"Perhaps. How long has Jim had that yacht?"

"Not long. Is the Princess Lilear's family the royal one in Karamania, Dicky?"

"I believe so. What a beautiful sweep of bay that is to the right, with those rugged mountains behind it!"

"Glorious! Then if Karamania should ever get out from under the Turkish yoke there would be a possibility of the Princess Lilear being of the royal family, I suppose. Has she any male relatives Dick?"

"You'd better ask her. There she is now. You say you know her?"

"We've met in Paris and at Cannes."

General Kostovo and the princess were standing on the terrace, looking toward the bay. Jim, who had lingered to give some orders, joined his sister and Dick. Dick presented them to the princess, who immediately recalled them. At Jim's mention of Hamdi Pasha, Kostovo raised his eyebrows.

"Then you are going up to Karoz?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes. I've engaged horses and servants and an *araba* for our duffle. You think it's quite safe?"

The general knit his brows.

"It has always been safe on this side. Going down to Saloniki you will need an armed escort. I had expected some of my own men, but they have not appeared. But there is no danger in so large a party as ours. We will be some dozen or more. You will give us the pleasure of your company as far as Plev, will you not? Our roads part there."

"You are not going to Karoz?" asked Edith.

"No, to Istria. But we are near neighbours. Hamdi's palace at Karoz is only twenty miles away; a morning canter. He has also a post at Suruk, and a very pretty palace there."

"Hamdi Pasha is Governor of Karamania, is he not?" asked Edith, in a limpid voice. "I suppose that means that he is autocrat."

A gleam shot from under Kostovo's bushy eyebrow's.

"I will ask you a riddle," said he, in what was meant to be a jocular tone. "On the Balkan Peninsula, what is the difference between a palace and a pig-sty? The answer is: 'Five minutes'!"

CHAPTER V

EARLY morning of the next day found them well upon their journey. The road climbed steadily upward, winding through deep chasms in the rugged hills, twisting in and out of the dry beds of cataracts, and sometimes crossing fresh little swales planted in currants or olives. Now and again it skirted the flank of some bare mountain, windswept, desolate, from the slope of which there stretched away a magnificent panorama of brown, tumbling hills, trooping down to the blue sea.

General Kostovo rode on ahead; some distance behind him came Dick by the side of Edith, while Jim and the princess followed. Well in the rear of the cavalcade were the servants and pack-animals, while the *arabas* transporting the heavy luggage were far behind.

"These hills," said Dick to Edith, "are without doubt chock full of precious minerals."

"Are they? I think that she is perfectly charming, Dick."

"Who?"

"Your princess, of course."

"Why do you call her my princess? She's her own princess—so far as I know."

"Is she? But after you have got her crowned as Queen of Karamania? Whose princess will she be then, Dicky?"

"Karamania's. Do you see that high peak on your right? There is a monastary on the top, and they haul you up in a basket. Only they would not haul *you* up at all."

Edith looked at him and laughed, her eyes half closed and her red upper lip curled teasingly.

"How interesting! You can fool men, Dick, and some women—if they wanted to be fooled, which is quite probable,"—she looked at him aslant—"but you can't fool me. I've always been able to read you, haven't I, Dicky mine?"

"No. You haven't!"

Edith threw him a quick, curious glance. Dick was staring straight ahead, his face rigid and a trifle pale. A fierce little expression passed across Edith's nymphlike features.

"Perhaps you are right, Dick. But we have always understood each other, don't you think?"

"If we have"—Dick turned sharply and looked at her—"it hasn't done us much good, has it?"

"Not to me, Dick; and you don't look as if your life had held as much happiness as—interest."

"Whose fault?"

"Mine, Dicky-bird; all mine."

"Then why——"

"I thought that you—you might——"

"No you didn't!" interrupted Dick roughly.

"If you understood me, as you claim to, you never thought any such thing!"

"Then I—hoped it." She looked at him smilingly and with the naughtiest expression which her nymph-like features could wear.

Dick stared back at her and his face grew dusky red.

"Don't talk like that! And don't look like that, either! It's not——"

"Proper, Dicky?"

"Modest. Your count, heaven rest his good-for-nothing bones, has done you no good."

"He did me no harm. He was never a husband, Dick. All he wanted was money; all I wanted was rank and position. Now I want—something else. Do you know what that is, Dicky?"

"Trouble!"

"One kind; love!" She looked at him with humid eyes and red parted lips.

"You can't have everything. Besides, you wouldn't know it when you got it—and it won't keep on ice."

Edith laughed. Warmest mischief flooded her lovely face.

"Tell me, Dicky, after you've throned your princess, what will you do with her?"

"What makes you think I want to throne her?" asked Dick irritably.

"What man wouldn't? I think that you've throned her already—in your heart. Be very, very

careful, Dicky; Oriental women are not distinguished for their patience; they've got something else instead."

"Don't talk rot, Edith. Playing with firearms is my business, just as playing with fire is yours. I'm not here for sentimental reasons."

"Dicky, you taught me to observe. I've said stupid, crafty things and watched the effect. Once General Kostovo looked at you and scowled, as if to say: '*What* have you been telling this woman?' The joke of it is that if I really wanted to know I would ask him, and he would tell me in five minutes. He's a child."

Dick laughed in spite of himself.

"Well, what have you learned?"

"First, she's in love with you—and she knows it."

Dick wilted on his pony. He turned to Edith a face infinitely bored but utterly devoid of any trace of embarrassment.

"I really believe you are getting old, Edith."

She smiled maliciously. "Second, you are in love with her—and you *don't* know it!"

Dick grinned. "That last is splendid. How did you ever guess? I never knew it for a second!"

The faintest shadow of doubt crossed Edith's face.

"Tell me the rest, Dick."

"What rest?"

"Oh—you and your princess."

"That's all, my dear."

"Nonsense! After she's queen; what will your service do for her then?"

"Leave her."

"That seems to be your idea of service to a woman."

"My service will be over then."

"No, Dicky-boy, only just begun!"

"Not mine!" He stared straight between his pony's ears, then looked the landscape over, and blew out his breath as if a trifle bored. Edith glanced curiously at his calm, clear-cut features, caught their expression of utter indifference, and a shade of doubt crossed her fresh face.

"Perhaps," she said, as if to herself. Dick glanced at her and suppressed a yawn; his eyes looked sleepily amused.

"*Lump!*" she flared out at him. The colour rushed into her cheeks and she laughed.

"*Silly!*" said Dick.

"Perhaps I am!" Her eyes sparkled. "I don't believe you could feel anything. Even a sword thrust. You'd die without it's hurting you. You've got no more nerves than a Chinaman."

Dick looked at her and grinned.

"Why don't you stop acting novels, Edith, and write 'em? Then you could have people the way you want 'em."

Edith looked as if she were going to cry. Instead, she began to laugh.

"I wish your princess *would* poke up your fires,

Dicky. But look out, my young friend; she's so jealous now that she could easily slip a knife into you and have me baled up in burlap and dropped into the Bosphorus. I'll bet that she beats you before you are a day older. And it will do you a world of good. Good-bye. I'm going to talk to Kostovo; he's got some natural feelings, if he is half savage and bushy-headed. You are nothing better than a Spartan, or a janizary, or a gladiator, or some other sort of a fighting-machine. But I *would* like to see you fight—if only with your princess." She shook her reins, and her nimble little Arab skipped up amongst the rocks like a mountain goat.

Dick looked after her with a set, rigid face; he took off his hat and batted a fly on his pony's neck. Then he laughed.

Presently Jim hailed him.

"Come and ride with Princess Lilear," he called. "I want to go back after my camera and get some pictures."

Dick reined to the side of the road and waited. A moment later the princess rode up abreast. Jim wheeled his horse and ambled back down the trail.

"Countess von Essingen got tired of me," said Dick.

"Indeed?" replied the princess, a little coldly.

"Yes. She prefers the society of your uncle."

"Countess von Essingen," said the princess, "must wonder at your being here."

"She knows."

"She *does?*" cried the princess angrily. "How extremely indiscreet of you!"

"I did not tell her anything; she guessed."

"And you told her that she had guessed correctly!" snapped the princess.

"I told her nothing; but I didn't contradict her, because if I had she would have thought that I was here to—eh——"

"To what?"

"To make love to you," said Dick calmly.

The colour rushed into the princess' face.

"How utterly absurd!" she cried angrily.

"Absolutely."

"What?"

"I agree with you."

The princess did not look particularly pleased.

"I am sorry," said she icily, "that I give the impression of being a woman who would permit a man to dangle about her in that way."

Dick did not answer. The princess observed that he was tugging at the end of his wiry moustache and studying the trail as though deep in thought.

"The Countess von Essingen is a very beautiful woman," she observed. "Don't you think so, Osborne Pasha?"

"Eh, what?" Dick looked around sharply. "I beg your pardon."

"Excuse me," said the princess sharply, "for having interrupted your train of thought. It was no doubt far more important than my remark."

"I was thinking," said Dick, "that it would be much better not to have Countess von Essingen and her brother go to Karoz. In the first place, Hamdi mustn't know that I'm at Istria."

"Surely you can trust your friends!"

"A woman is apt to let something slip. Hamdi knows my name, although we've never met. He'd put two and two together and might rush things. Just now we are 'sparring for time.'"

"What would you suggest?"

"Couldn't you ask them to Istria?"

The princess compressed her pretty lips and glanced at him quickly. Dick was frowning at his pony's ears.

"Of course," said the princess, "any friends of Osborne Pasha's——"

"Oh, it's not a social thing," Dick interrupted, not too politely. "If you could put them up for a couple of days Hamdi would know that you were entertaining guests, and that would disarm all suspicion and give us a chance to get our breath and make some plans."

"Of course," said the princess, "we should be very happy to have them visit us. I will ask them when we stop for lunch."

Something in her tone impelled Dick to glance at her quickly; the princess' face was inscrutable.

"I hope," said the princess, in her coldest voice, "that any confidences which you may see fit to share with your friends will not include this ridiculous

proxy marriage which my uncle appears to think necessary."

"Of course not!" said Dick sharply.

The princess laughed, mirthlessly.

"You are emphatic," she said.

Dick's tanned face darkened in tint.

"They would not understand; besides, that is strictly our own affair."

"I don't understand it very well myself," said the princess.

"Don't worry. You can trust Kostovo to see that I don't get any claim on you."

"There would be no danger of that in any case."

"Not the slightest."

"Nor of my having any claim upon you."

"No more than you've got now."

"If you feel as if you had me on your hands," said the princess, "you had better turn your pony around at once and go back where you came from."

"I feel," said Dick calmly, "that in a few days I will not only have upon my hands a spoiled and pampered princess, but also her whole blessed country, her army, diplomatic corps, cabinet and general infant dynasty. You've taken me on for the job and here I am until it's finished—or *I* am! Of *course* you are on my hands!"

Dick's voice was stern and crisp, but there was a twinkle in his eye and a smile lurking under his moustache.

"You are not very respectful," exclaimed the princess angrily.

Dick wheeled in his saddle.

"Suppose you get our relative positions straightened out, once for all," said he, with a touch of austerity. "You are not yet queen by a great deal. You are only a princess by courtesy. Actually, you are Mademoiselle Kostovo, a woman subject of the sultan, which as you know is not a distinctly elevated social position. On the other hand, from the moment when Kostovo accepted my service in behalf of the country of which you are destined to be the chief figurehead, I have assumed command of everything, yourself included. Now don't let's have any more talk about my being respectful and nonsense of that sort."

The princess did not answer. For some distance they rode in silence. Once the princess drew out her handkerchief and raised it furtively to her face, but the man at her side was not looking at her; did not appear to be giving her a thought. The silence was broken by Jim who clattered past, his camera slung over his shoulder, and his pony scrambling along the edge of the steep descent and starting small avalanches down its side.

"I'm going up to the head of the gorge," said he, "to get a picture of this procession as it comes up. You don't mind?" he asked the princess.

She shook her head at him and smiled, then glanced quickly away.

Dick turned and looked at her. The princess' face was very pale and her eyes half veiled. Between the lashes there was a light glint, almost metallic in tone.

"Hope I haven't hurt you," said Dick, "but it's always well to have an understanding."

The princess did not answer.

"As commander-in chief," he continued, "the discipline must reach throughout. If I've hurt your feelings tryin' to make this plain, I'm sorry."

"*You brute!*"

Dick shrugged. Presently he drew a note-book from his pocket and began to make some memoranda. The princess looked at him aslant. Her eyes passed quickly down the square, straight military figure to the big-boned hand which held the pencil. His pony shied, and instantly the powerful knees came together with a force which made the animal grunt. To the princess the man looked a rough-hewn, human fighting-machine. Unconsciously she sighed.

"Tired?" asked Dick gently.

A quiver passed through the princess; still smarting from the harsh words delivered to her the minute before, he himself had quite put them from his mind. A sudden sense of helplessness overcame her. She turned her shoulder to him. Dick stared for a moment, then rode on in silence.

The road, just at this point, wound up through a narrow gorge, opening above upon a broad plateau,

the Plain of Plev. Here the high wind which almost continuously sweeps this bare expanse had drifted the fine golden sand into the funnel-shaped gully and through this heavy carpet the horses were toiling patiently. Ahead of them rose the dark Kara mountains, looming high above the sandhills as they climbed. Below, the land fell away in rugged outline until, far in the distance, they caught the silver flash of the sea.

"You know what I told you on the ship," said Dick, presently. "I don't want to be rough, but we mustn't have any foolishness."

The princess' teeth came together with a little click. She turned upon him suddenly; the colour had all left her face and her light eyes with the pupils like pin-points were opened to the full of their startling width.

"You brute!" she cried, passionately. "I'd like to see you *fight!* It's all you are fit for! I'd like to see you *fight*—and *killed!*"

As she spoke a gunshot rang out ahead; another followed it; then came a volley, the reverberations pulsing down the gorge on the flaws of the high wind. A wild clamour of yells arose; with them came the unmistakable reports of an automatic pistol: "*Pank—pank—pank—pank—pank!*" Short and sharp and evenly punctuated. Cries, gusty and fierce, followed, and the next instant a swarm of horsemen swept around a bend in the gorge and came pouring down upon them.

"*Brigands!*" said Dick. "Keep close to me!" His big army Colt was out and resting on his hip.

On ahead, Kostovo and Edith had reined in at the first shot. The horse-boys had promptly bolted. The general was struggling to unsling his carbine, but before he could get it clear the rush was upon them.

A hairy-faced rider cut savagely at Kostovo, who caught the blade on the stock of his weapon, turning it so that the flat side struck his pony across the ears. The animal screamed and reared, then swerved, and losing his footing in the deep sand fell backward, flinging Kostovo to the ground.

The assailants did not wait; one of them tore the rein from Edith's hands and whipped it over her pony's head; another struck the beast upon the flank and they were on after the others.

Straight at Dick and the princess they came, the riders yelling and brandishing their yataghans. Waiting until the range suited him, Dick threw up his big .45, and began to shoot with the quick but deadly accuracy of a plainsman. The first saddle was emptied, and as the rider lurched forward his pony stopped with a snort and a horseman close at his heels pitched into him; before he could clear himself the Colt barked again and he, too, was on the ground.

With the tail of his eye Dick saw the brigand leading Edith's horse rush past; he swung in his saddle and fired, but without result. At the same

moment he saw Edith lean far forward, something flashed in her hand and a jet of smoke spurted against the broad back of her captor, who reeled to one side and with a yell pitched headlong from his horse. The rein was in the crook of his elbow; the head of Edith's pony was jerked sharply down and the animal turned a somersault, flinging his rider to the sand.

But Dick was very busy. A brigand slashed at him with a yataghan; he caught the blow on his revolver, then shoved the muzzle into the man's face and fired. At the same instant the princess screamed, and he turned to see a huge, bearded man dragging her from the saddle.

"Hang on!" yelled Dick, and flung himself to her side.

The brigand loosed his hold and lunged at him across the back of the princess' pony. Dick swung his body clear of the thrust, getting only a cut on the top of his shoulder from the edge of the blade; then before the man could recover he grabbed his sword-arm and overbalanced as the fellow was, hauled him bodily out of the saddle and struck him a crushing blow across the head with his revolver.

But another brigand was almost upon him; his weapon was empty, and to escape being cut down he slipped from his pony, using the animal as a bulwark. Twice the man slashed at him, and for a moment the situation was almost ridiculous—Dick unarmed and dodging the assaults of the other.

There came the crack of a carbine and the man fell across his pony's neck and began to scream. The yataghan dropped from his hand and he clutched at the mane; the horse wheeled and bolted, carrying him still screaming down the gorge.

The princess was striking savagely with her crop at a dismounted brigand who was trying to wrench the reins from her grasp. As Dick, yataghan in hand, rushed to her aid, the man turned and ran, but before he had gone ten steps there came a gun shot and he fell. The princess' pony, maddened and frightened, was doing its best to bolt after the other horses, and might have succeeded had not Dick grabbed the bridle.

As swiftly as they had come the brigands were gone again, leaving a number of dead and dying men and a dead pony. Suddenly a fusillade from down the gorge told that they had encountered the servants.

"Well!" panted Dick. "You almost had your wish, didn't you? I hope you're satisfied!"

General Kostovo came toward them, running heavily through the deep sand and brandishing his smoking carbine.

"*Mash Allah!*" he gasped. "These accursed devils! These dogs of robbers! I'm afraid they've killed your friend and they've got the countess!"

"No, they haven't," said Dick. "She's over there!"

They looked around and saw Edith walking slowly

toward them. Her habit was covered with powdery grains of golden sand; her hat was gone and her abundant chestnut hair tumbled about her shoulders. The small, silver-mounted revolver was in her hand.

"*Mash Allah!*" cried the general. "You took care of yourself if I could not take care of you!"

"Jim and I were born and bred on a ranch. Where *is* Jim?" She looked around and a sudden horror filled her eyes.

"What are these dogs?" growled the general. "Such a thing has never happened in this district! They are not Macedonians, or Turks, or Servians!" He avoided Edith's eye.

"Where's Jim?" she repeated, her face suddenly blanched.

"I'm afraid," began Kostovo, then stopped. Edith's eyes were opened wide and her lips were quivering. She walked unsteadily to Dick and putting both hands on his shoulder rested her forehead upon them, her breath coming in gasps, her body swaying. Dick threw one arm about her.

"Dick," she said chokingly, "they must have killed Jim!"

"We don't know yet, Edith. Let's go to him."

"Just a moment, Dick." One of her hands slipped to his other shoulder and for a moment she rested her head against his chest. The princess looked on in silence.

"Wait here," said Kostovo. "I will go."

"I will go, too," said the princess, the only one who was still mounted. "Keep her here with you."

Edith freed herself.

"I am all right now. Come, Dick."

Dick had already started through the deep sand, mechanically loading his revolver as he walked. Edith struggled to keep up with his long strides.

"Dick, dear!" she said. "You're wounded."

"Wounded?" asked the princess breathlessly.

"It's nothing," growled Dick. "Just a little slice. Let's hurry!"

"I can't keep up," panted Edith.

Dick held out his hand and she slipped hers into it. Kostovo was hanging to the princess' stirrup, puffing as he walked. They passed two brigands, face down; a few yards distant a wounded man was sitting up, watching them narrowly. At sight of him Kostovo raised his carbine; the princess saw the motion and thrust at him with her foot. He growled like a dog, but let the weapon fall again.

As they neared the bend Dick looked at Edith.

"How do you feel?" he asked gently.

She raised her lovely face; its expression was that of a brave but horror-stricken child.

"I'm prepared for the worst, Dick. Dear old Jim!" Her voice choked.

Dick's pressure on her hand tightened. They passed around a projecting mass of sandstone and came suddenly upon Jim.

He was sitting with his back against a boulder

and both long legs stretched to an amazing distance in front of him, calmly lighting a cigarette. Almost at his feet were two dead brigands, yataghan in hand. At some distance was another, half buried under a dead horse.

Jim appeared to be bleeding from every part of his long frame. A scarf was knotted about one limb just above the knee. A handkerchief was bound about his head and another around his wrist. There were bloodstains on his chest and side.

"I heard your voices," said he cheerfully, "so I knew that you must be all right. A warm corner for a beginner. Go easy, old girl; I'm all shot up."

Edith had dropped to her knees in the sand and flung her arms around his neck.

"Anybody hurt, Dick?" asked Jim. "I see you got it in the shoulder."

"None of us," said Dick. "Don't know how the servants made out; all right I guess; we didn't leave much of that gang."

Jim's face fell. "I don't see why I didn't do better!" he complained. "I had nine shots and only bagged three. I met 'em right here, coming full jump. Everything was so mixed up I don't know what really happened until I found myself behind this rock, potting 'em as carefully as I could. What were they?"

His voice was growing faint. Dick did not answer; he was examining his friend's wounds. Jim swore mildly.

"Bone broken?"

"No, drilled right through." Dick's face wrinkled. "That means modern arms—yet they preferred steel! What the dickens——"

Jim's head dropped forward and he fainted.

"*Mash Allah!*" growled Kostovo. "These Anglo-Saxons! They are all fighters by nature—even the women! *Tchk, tchk, tchk!*" He looked thoughtful, then left the others and disappeared behind the rocks.

Jim presently revived, and a few moments later the servants came up leading four horses whose riders had been killed. They reported that they had been a considerable distance behind when they heard the firing and promptly got their weapons ready. The brigands, only five in number, three of whom appeared to be wounded, did not attack them but fired three shots, then turned up a defile and disappeared.

As they were telling their story a gun-shot rang out close at hand. Dick whipped up his Colt and looked around the projecting mass of rock. A hundred yards below was General Kostovo leaning over a wounded brigand. Telling the others to wait where they were, Dick ploughed his way through the sand to join him.

Kostovo turned to Dick a very grim face.

"It is as I feared. I have been questioning this man; that other was stubborn, so." He tapped his carbine. "This is more of Hamdi's work! A plot

to kidnap the princess! These men are more than brigands; they are of Hamdi's newly recruited corps of Montenegrins from the border. Hamdi intercepted my courier and sent these rascals to meet us instead of my Akindschis. He did not guess at the —eh—character of our party," he added grimly.

"The first blow!" growled Dick. "The custom-house was merely a curtain raiser."

"He means to force our hand," said Kostovo.

"He means to check-mate our queen."

Kostovo pointed toward the east. "Istria is behind those hills," said he, "and the princess is here; and Karoz and Hamdi are in between."

"Would he dare to seize her in Karoz, do you think?"

"Hamdi would dare anything!"

"What other route is there to Istria?"

"The only other route goes past Suruk; Hamdi has a palace there and a garrison. It is probable that every cow-path to Istria is watched. He is a thorough man."

"Wait a minute!" Dick scrambled to the top of a high sand-hill and studied the surrounding country through his glass.

Far away on the Plain of Plev a large herd of horses were grazing; thousands of wild-fowl were circling the lake; a windy swirl of smoke marked the hovel of some herder; a jackal was slinking off between two mounds. Aside from these, there were

no signs of life. He slid down the side of the bank and rejoined Kostovo.

"Has the princess' maid got a *yashmac* and *feridjé*, do you think?" he asked.

"Probably; the maid must have a *feridjé*, and she could make a *yashmac*, or better an *all'antica* from any piece of cloth. You mean——"

"Yes. I'll get a *fez* and *kaftan* and some shoes from the horse-boys and take the princess to Istria."

"Through Suruk?"

"That's best."

Kostovo looked doubtful.

"Why not?" asked Dick.

"It weakens our party. Suppose that we are attacked again?"

"That makes no difference. These fellows that got away will report us a strong party, and the next time Hamdi will send an entire troop. Besides, Gordon is badly wounded, and we would surrender in any case. They don't want our lives; they want the princess, and when they found that she was not in the party they would probably clear out."

Kostovo nodded.

"Do you think that you can do it?"

"Why not? I speak the language. We'll take a couple of these horses to lead. I'll be a wandering horse-trader."

"The plan seems good," said Kostovo slowly, "but——"

"But what!"

"There's the princess."

"Well?"

"She's proud! She's Karamanian! She will consider it beneath her dignity to return to her country by the back door, and beneath her caste to wear a servant's clothes."

"What rot!"

"That is true. But just the same, she will not do it!"

"She'll have to!" said Dick grimly.

CHAPTER VI

Dick swung in his saddle and observed the princess with a coldly critical eye. Her maid had constructed an *all'antica*, or face-cloth, having two holes for the eyes; this was pinned to the front of the *chaf-chaf*, or hood, in such a manner that when dropped it completely screened her face. The voluminous *feridjé*, designed by the Prophet to conceal all that was seductive in the figures of the women of the faithful, completely enveloped her, but the brisk wind sweeping down the gorge made rather a mockery of its elevated purport.

The princess had thrown back her *all'antica*, and the face beneath it was far from being a tranquil one. Only the thinnest gleam of her light-coloured eyes was visible between the double fringe of long, dark lashes; there was a crimson spot in either cheek which left the rest of her face a clear, pale olive, and her pretty lips were set rigidly. She sat her pony immobile as a carven image, regardless of the road, regardless of her companion, regardless even of the disorderly wind which sometimes blew the light *feridjé* above her knees, a detail of no consequence to a Turkish woman, who considers an exposure of the hands or face as far more immodest than that of the legs. The graceful limbs of the

princess were encased in the heavy woollen stockings which formed a part of her disguise.

Dick scrutinised her with cold disapproval. To his way of thinking the mental attitude of his companion was inexcusable; an ill-timed demonstration of bad temper on the part of a spoiled and pampered woman.

He himself was costumed in *kaftan* and *fez*, the latter with a turban twisted about it to hide his close-cropped hair. His heavy woollen trousers were caught about the hips by a sash through which was thrust a yataghan, and he wore a pair of sandal-like shoes which he had taken from one of the horse-boys. Behind him he led two of the Montenegrin horses. In a country where the different races and nationalities are as mixed as that through which they travelled he could have passed anywhere for an itinerant Balkan horse-trader.

Presently the road entered a narrow chasm which led up steeply, twisting and turning through the bare, rocky hills. Dick thrust his hand under his sash and loosened his big revolver in its holster. The princess noticed the act and her lips curled.

"Your ability as a hand-to-hand fighter is rather ahead of your generalship, is it not?" she asked.

"'Fraid so."

"As a professional soldier and strategist," continued the princess mercilessly, "don't you think that you are making rather a poor showing?"

"Well rather—so far," admitted Dick.

"There was the custom-house"—the princess' voice was withering—"which you watched them burn from behind the corner of the wall; then there was this ambush into which you innocently led your friends and myself, and now this silly masquerade?"

"The custom-house and the ambuscade were pretty bad, I'll admit. But what's the matter with this plan? Costume unbecoming?"

The blood poured into the princess' face.

"For a man who has fought with Turkish troops," said she, "it seems to me that you have learned very little of Turkish methods. You kindly do each time precisely what Hamdi expects you to do!"

"Wonder if he expected us to do what we did to his Montenegrins."

"He had not counted on your friends; they were accidental."

"They were awful bad accidents for these johnnies!"

"But to return to your own interesting tactics," pursued the princess cuttingly. "This dashing plan of yours for smuggling me into Istria disguised as a servant——"

"Drop your hood!" interrupted Dick, curtly. "There's somebody on ahead!"

The path at this point wound up through a steep, boulder-strewn rift in the hills. A short distance ahead, toiling in and out amongst the rocks, was a

file of men on foot. They wore the high, yellow *kulah* (cap), broad, pleated petticoats and pelisses reaching almost to the knee. Some few carried musical instruments, and all were provided with the *keshkool*, or staff of office. Dick saw at a glance that they were dervishes of the Mevlevee, or dancing order.

As they overtook them he saluted the sheik, who responded gravely. They had almost passed when one of the younger dervishes made a remark directed toward the princess which, commonplace as it was from an Oriental point of view, brought the blood to Dick's face and a quick tension to his muscles. A titter of laughter followed the pleasantry, and at the same time Dick's ear caught a phrase from the lips of the princess, which if translated literally from the Turkish into English might be properly regarded as profane. He reined in slightly, until she came up abreast. Through the holes cut in the *all'antica* a pair of lurid eyes looked intently into his.

"I can't help it," said he, with a sudden, fierce impatience. "What does it matter? The main thing is to get you to Istria!"

"No matter how much I may be insulted en route?"

"What does a remark from a dancing dervish matter to a woman who is trying for a throne? Would you rather have Hamdi Pasha's hospitality? You know what that means! I tell you, my lady,

that once inside Hamdi's *hareemlick* you'd find mighty little respect shown your exalted rank; and still less to your elevated ideas regarding your attitude toward a husband to whom you were not united by ties of love. Well?"

He swung in his saddle, for the princess had reined in her horse and was staring at him with such an intensity of fury that although her face was completely covered there was no mistaking the emotion which blazed from the openings cut for the eyes. Dick was seized by a sudden savage exasperation.

"Come along!" he said harshly. "You have acted like a spoiled baby all day. Now play that you are grown up!"

Before he could guess her purpose the princess had swung her pony in its track, struck it a sharp blow with the oak stick which Dick himself had that morning cut for her, and the next instant the animal was plunging down the trail.

For a moment Dick stared after her, then, dropping the halter-rope of his led horses, he turned and rode back. Realising that the princess was Karamanian born and rode some fifty pounds lighter than himself, he did not try to overtake her, but fortune favored him. The Mevlevee dervishes, hearing the clatter of hoofs and seeing the woman who had just passed them dashing down the dangerous slope, supposed that her horse had bolted. The gully was narrow, and the Dervishes spreading

quickly across it held their *keshkools* horizontally and shouted.

The half-tamed Arab stopped in its tracks, threw up its wild head and snorted; then as one of the dervishes waved his leopard-skin cloak it wheeled and bolted back to its companions. The next moment Dick's hand fell on the bridle rein, snatched it from the princess' grasp, and threw it over the pony's head.

"Now," said he sternly, "we will have no more of this nonsense!"

The princess flung back her hood and her passion-riven face shone marble-white against the black *chaf-chaf*. Her lips were parted over her even teeth and the pupils of her light-grey eyes were contracted to the merest pin-points. Never before had Dick beheld such a devastating fury on the face of any woman.

"Let go!" she said, in a strangling voice. "Give me my rein!"

"Will you promise to be good and not try to run away?"

With a motion as quick as the blow of a leopard the princess' riding-crop flashed up and came down with all of the strength of her arm, just below Dick's elbow. His hold did not relax.

"Will you let go?" panted the princess.

"No!"

Down came the stick again; had it been of any

fragile wood it might have splintered from the force of the blow.

"*Now will you?*" She raised the crop.

"I wouldn't do that," said Dick evenly. "That's my revolver arm, and I may need it again before we get to Istria."

The stick dropped from the princess' hand; she jerked her head and the *all'antica* dropped over her face. Dick turned slowly and, leading her pony, rode on up the trail.

At the top of the defile the road came out upon a broad, wind-swept plateau, the Plain of Plev, which stretches from the Kara or Black Hills in the north and east to where, some fifty miles away, the river Plev cuts its way through the southwestern barrier. Herds of cattle and horses were grazing as far as the eye could see. The wind was blowing in fierce gusts, and the purple shadows from the big cumulus clouds were racing across from the blue mountains to the eastward. Far in the distance were some scattered buildings, the dome of a large mosque and a pair of white, slender minarets standing out distinctly against the dull background.

"There is Suruk," said Dick, rather to himself than to the princess.

As they rode out upon the plain his trained eye was caught by a smear of black moving toward the town in a swirl of dust. Approaching nearer, he saw that it was another and larger band of der-

vishes which he immediately recognised from their costumes as belonging to the Rufa'ee, or howling sect. At their head walked the sheik, a tall man with a black turban and a black *kaftan* covering a long crimson robe. They were a wild, savage-looking lot of fanatics, and their gaunt, emaciated faces showed frightful scars from the self-inflicted mutilations practised as part of their revolting ritual.

"There is something in the wind," thought Dick, "to bring all of these beggars to this out-of-the-way little place."

Not a sound came from the princess. Still leading her pony and the two Montenegrin horses, Dick approached the town. As he drew near the mosque he observed with some disquiet that there was a great multitude of people moving about; booths and tents of every fantastic colour and design had been erected, and the smoke from hundreds of little fires was swirling and eddying in all directions.

When they had almost reached the mosque a Mollah began to cry the *azzan* from the top of a minaret. His wild, raucous voice was borne to the congregation on the flaws of the gusty wind.

"*Allah akbar! A shadu an la ilaha illa 'llah!*"

At the first outcry the place began to swarm with life and motion. From the coffees and dwelling-houses and tents and booths and bazaars, from the mosque itself, a multi-coloured swarm of humanity came pushing and crowding and jostling out into

the hot, windy sunshine. Dick reined up sharply and dismounted.

"Get down," he said.

The princess did not move. The high wind was whipping the light *feridjé* about her in a manner to make the prophet Mohammed turn in his grave, but the princess sat stonily impassive. Dick stepped to the side of her pony, took her waist in both powerful hands, and lifted her from the saddle. A peculiar shudder ran through the girl.

"Kneel," he said, setting her down. The princess sank to the ground.

All about them the kneeling multitude was rising and falling in perfect rhythmic time with the motions of the *Iman*, the "one who bends," at each repetition of the name of Allah. For five minutes the devotions continued. Suddenly they ceased, and a fanatic leaped to his feet, sprang upon an *araba*, and raised his voice in a howl.

"*Ahandu arma Mohammadan rasulullah!*"

Instantly a roar arose from the worshippers; a dervish leaped beside the first and began to clamour; something flashed above his head; the flash was mirrored in hundreds of gleaming blades which pierced upward like tongues of pallid flame. Above the uproar came a series of ringing words—and all at once Dick understood.

"My word!" he gasped, "it's a holy war!"

CHAPTER VII

To Dick all became clear. Hamdi Pasha, taking advantage of General Kostovo's absence, or perhaps, even before his departure to England to fetch the princess, had sent emissaries far and near to incite the bloodthirsty, fanatical element of the region into declaring a holy war against the heretical Karamanians.

But this, Dick felt confident, could not be done at once. It would still take days for the hordes to gather, and there would have to be much praying and oratory and whirling and howling and dervish mummery before the Moslem rabble would be aroused to the proper pitch of frenzy or should have gathered sufficient strength to swarm on into the hills to massacre the subjects of the Princess Lilear.

"Here's a *djehad* declared against us," said Dick. "The situation is getting interesting; if it were to be discovered that we were Giaours we would not be alive three minutes. Don't you think it's about time to get over your bad temper?"

Not a sign of life came from the girl. Dick shrugged his shoulders, then stooping over, picked her up in his arms and placed her in the saddle. Again the violent tremor ran through the yielding figure of the princess, but she made no resistance.

Nobody noticed them as they picked their way through the throngs which filled the town. There were priests of every sect, and of such variety as is only to be found in the devotees of Islam. There were *mu'azzins*, or prayer-criers, *khatibs*, the preachers, *moakits*, or winders of the clocks, *turbhé-bachi*, the keepers of tombs, an occasional *ulemã*, or learned man, here and there a filthy *santon*, or holy man, often stark naked and covered with sores.

Most numerous of all were the dervishes, vultures always to be found where there is the prospect of infidel blood and infidel plunder. The different orders of these "beggars from door to door" were united for the only purpose for which they ever do unite, the destruction of heretics, although themselves the rankest of heretics from the teachings of Mohammed as written in the Koran. There were the *Mevlevee*, the *Rufâ'ee*, the *Dusookee*, who do not bow down at prayer, the *Kadirees*, who pray walking each with his hands upon the shoulders of his neighbour, the scarlet-capped *Bedawees* and countless others. The dancing dervishes had set up a *tekkieh*, and from within it came the sound of music and the shuffling of feet.

Dick observed that with this rabble of Moslem priests there was also a fair sprinkling of Kurds, the fiercest, ugliest and stupidest of Ottoman subjects, the slaughterers of the Armenian Christians and, no doubt, imported by Hamdi especially for the work in hand. One sign of recognition, one

cry of "Giaour," and his life would not have been worth the unclean turban which encircled his *fez*.

The road to Istria led through the town and on past a small palace built of native marble standing in the middle of a parklike enclosure, the whole of which was encircled by a wall. They had almost reached the gates when there came the clear, high note of a Turkish bugle, and a moment later a cavalcade began to stream out upon the road, turning in the direction of the town. At the head rode a handsome, military figure in full Turkish uniform, accompanied by two men, apparently Europeans and dressed in orthodox English riding-costume. Behind them came a troop of horsemen which Dick recognised with horror as belonging to the same corps of Montenegrin mercenaries as the people by whom they had been that morning attacked.

"Permit me to congratulate you on this last stroke of military genius, Osborne Pasha!" said a bitter voice at his side. "Here comes Hamdi Pasha himself!"

"Hamdi, is it?" said Dick. "H'mph—we're trapped!"

"How very clever of you! But we've been trapped all the time."

Dick did not answer the taunt; his mind was working swiftly.

"It's too late to bolt," said he, as if thinking aloud, "and there's no chance of my fooling Hamdi."

"There never has been any chance of your fooling Hamdi," said the princess scornfully. "You blunder in and blunder out again, and are always one thought behind."

"Hope I can blunder out this time. There's only one chance."

"To fight the whole troop?" asked the princess sarcastically.

"No, not fight. Bluff!"

The cavalcade was by this time very close. Dick and his companion were already under the keen, searching scrutiny of the Ottoman. Hamdi Pasha was a strikingly handsome man, tall, finely made, with a broad, intellectual forehead, deep, lustrous eyes, and a well-chiselled face which had in its expression nothing cruel or treacherous. No doubt from his Oriental view-point the means of warfare which he had employed were quite proper and legitimate; by the same code he would not have hesitated a moment at having Dick stabbed in the back and the princess escorted to the *hareemlick* of his palace, there to become slave or *kutchuk hanum* as his fancy pleased. Treachery and cruelty and ruthless bloodshed are so much a part of Ottoman traditions as to be quite accepted as a necessity of Ottoman methods.

Hamdi Pasha, as he sat on his magnificent Arab stallion, was an admirable figure; in his tall astrakan fez, his well-cut military blouse trimmed with the same material, his smart German cavalry

breeches, and his high-heeled French boots with their golden spurs, he had an air at once Oriental and European. One would have found it hard to believe that he had that morning issued an *iradé*, giving over the dwellers of the Kara Hills to the vengeance, pillage and lust of his horde of Moslem fanatics, and in the same nonchalant way given orders for the torture of a slave who had displeased him.

But what Hamdi would not have done, what would have been opposed to every fibre of his hot, Oriental nature, would have been to countenance the harming of a single hair of the head of a friend coming to claim his proffered hospitality. It was the knowledge of this trait of Ottoman character which furnished Dick with his cue. He rode straight toward Hamdi, who, seeing that he was about to be accosted, eyed him suspiciously, and let one hand drop to the butt of the revolver on his hip.

"Have I the honor of addressing his excellency, Hamdi Pasha?" asked Dick, in French, saluting stiffly at the same time.

Hamdi raised his heavy eyebrows in surprise. The two Europeans, who were Germans apparently, stared.

"Who may you be?" demanded the Ottoman.

"I am an American traveller."

"Indeed? Why are you dressed in that disguise?" asked Hamdi, suspiciously.

"When you have heard what I have to tell you," said Dick sternly, "you will understand."

"Speak, then!"

"While travelling from Podoni to Karoz with my two friends, Mr. Gordon, of New York, and his sister, the Countess von Essingen——"

"What!" interrupted Hamdi. He leaned forward in his saddle. "What is that?"

"I say, that while travelling with my friends, Mr. Gordon and Countess von Essingen, from Podoni to Karoz," continued Dick, impatiently, "through a country which we had been assured was perfectly safe——"

"But—but I do not understand. You say that Mr. Gordon and his sister were at Podoni?"

"Precisely. Mr. Gordon came there on his yacht intending to ride to Karoz, visit his friend, Hamdi Pasha, and then return by way of Saloniki where the yacht was to meet him. Instead of this, he is lying on the road where it strikes the Plain of Plev, wounded in four places by the bullets of his friend's somewhat irregular troopers, in what appeared to be an attempt to kidnap the Countess von Essingen."

"To kidnap the countess!" cried Hamdi, startled for the moment beyond his self-control. "You say it was the countess——" He checked himself, biting his lower lip.

"Naturally it was the countess!" exclaimed Dick, with a gesture of impatience. "The news had evidently reached them from Podoni that a very rich American and his sister had arrived on a large

steam-yacht and were riding to Karoz. It was certainly an attempt to kidnap and demand a ransom."

Hamdi Pasha nodded to himself, as if forced to admit the truth of the charge. His face wore an expression of unutterable chagrin.

"There were also in our party," Dick continued, "a Karamanian horse-dealer and his niece, Monsieur and Mademoiselle Kostovo, residents of Karos, I believe. The fact that the attack was directed almost entirely against Countess von Essingen and her brother proves that its sole object was to kidnap the countess——"

He was interrupted by a gust of rage from Hamdi Pasha.

"*Sapristi!*" cried the Ottoman, furiously. "But I would not have had this happen for the whole of this accursed country and all within it!" The blood rushed to his face and he broke into a torrent of French invective, from which he passed in turn to his own tongue, and delivered himself of such a flood of abuse as the Turkish language is able to provide. "These accursed descendants of many generations of unclean beasts! I will have them blinded with hot irons! Can they not tell the difference between an American lady and a Karamanian hill-woman!" He checked himself suddenly. His eyes flashed at Dick with quick suspicion.

"A litter would be of more assistance to our friends than bad talk," said Dick curtly.

Hamdi scowled and seemed on the verge of a savage retort. He controlled himself, and said:

"Everything shall be done that is possible. But tell me first some more in regard to this affair. How is it that you were able to defend yourselves?"

"We were not taken entirely unprepared. Monsieur Kostovo had warned us that the country was a savage one, but assured us that with a party as large as ours there was not the slightest danger of attack."

"*Sacrés cochons!* How large was your party?"

"Including Monsieur Kostovo's man-servant and the steward and *valet-de-chambre* of Mr. Gordon, we were six, well armed. Although outnumbered, we were able to beat off these brigands; for I regret to say I can call them by no other name, particularly as after the first volley, directed toward Mr. Gordon, who was riding ahead at the time, they attacked us only with their yataghans."

Hamdi was gnawing at his lip.

"You did well. I congratulate you as much as I censure myself and that is a great deal! I wish that you had slain them to a man! Except that in such a case it would deprive me of the gratification of punishing the survivors!" His eyes flashed toward the princess, who was a little behind Dick.

"Who is that woman?" he asked.

"The maid of Mademoiselle Kostovo," said Dick indifferently. "It appears that she is a native of this country. I brought her to show me the road.

And these," he threw aside the halter-rope of the led horses, "belong to you, I believe. Monsieur Kostovo suggested my taking them that I might pass for a wandering horse-trader."

Hamdi Pasha scrutinised him keenly.

"You are familiar with this country?" he asked. "You speak the language?"

"I have been here to shoot, and I speak a little Arabic—But we are losing time! My friend is in a critical condition. With your permission I shall now return."

Hamdi Pasha held out a restraining hand. "But first you must rest and have some refreshment," he exclaimed. "In half an hour I will be ready and we will all go down together."

Dick bowed stiffly. "You are very kind," he said, in a cold voice, "but I would prefer to return at once. Mr. Gordon is in a very critical condition."

Hamdi scowled.

"As you wish," said he.

Saluting the others, Dick wheeled his horse and rode slowly toward the town, followed by the princess. Glancing back, as if to speak to her, he saw that Hamdi was standing where he had left him in the middle of the road.

The princess did not speak. They rode through the town and on past the mosque. Once clear of the rabble about the building, Dick drew rein, dismounted, and proceeded to tighten the girths.

"Now for a race," said he.

"To where?" asked the princess contemptuously.

"To the hills. To Istria."

"That's twenty-five miles."

"The horses are good for it," said Dick. "They've got to be. Hamdi's not satisfied. He's thinking."

"He's still a thought ahead of you," snapped the princess.

"How?"

"He's Ottoman."

"Well, what if he is?"

"Oh, you—*novice!*" said the princess, with contempt. "I suppose that you think you have outwitted him. You have fooled him for the moment, but it will not last long."

"It doesn't need to—if we ride more and talk less." Dick mounted. "It doesn't need to last for half an hour."

"It doesn't for Hamdi," snapped the princess.

"Why not?"

"Because, Mr. Soldier, he has got every rabbit track to Istria already watched. They will continue to be watched."

The idlers near by were beginning to look at them curiously. Dick shook his reins and they moved off, circling the outskirts of the town.

"Where now?" asked the princess.

"We will make a detour around Hamdi's palace and strike the road higher up. How far is the river?"

"Three kilometres, perhaps. It's dry."

"Kostovo said that there were only two places where we could cross," said Dick. "You think that they will both be watched?"

"Of course they will. Hamdi's no fool."

"But we're disguised."

The princess laughed scornfully. "And to think that you resigned your commission from the army of your country because it gave so little play to your talents—your military genius."

Dick flushed. "I never said that—but never mind. You think that they'll stop us?"

"Of course they'll stop us," said the princess. "How long, pray, is it going to take you to find out that Hamdi has declared war? Istria is blockaded."

"Gad!" said Dick sarcastically. "You don't need me."

"I wish I were a man, for about a day," exclaimed the princess.

"I wish that you were—for about ten minutes!" said Dick, softly.

"You wouldn't be here if I were."

"One of us would stay here, I'm afraid," said Dick.

The princess laughed. Dick grinned.

"Let's go," said he.

"Where?"

"To Istria."

"With Hamdi's troopers between? How?"

"On horseback."

"You are a wit as well as a strategist. We'll ride through them?"

"Through 'em or over 'em or around 'em. Let's go and see, unless——" he gathered up his reins, then turned and looked at the princess, "you prefer the *hareemlick*."

"What does it matter? It is the *hareemlick* for me if we fail; we might as well try for Istria." She looked at him aslant. "But how about yourself? It's a shame to cut short a career of so great promise."

"What does it matter?" Dick grinned. "It's a bullet for me if we fail; we might as well try for Istria."

They shook the reins, and their horses sprang forward, sweeping along with the light, springy stride for which they are famed and which they owe to their long pasterns and the broad, muscular shoulders peculiar to the breed. Where the European hunter gets power from his hindquarters the Karamanian horse employs his shoulders equally; there is something almost doglike in the action of one of these animals in running over broken ground, and especially in leaping, when he squats with his whole body before taking off. There is no horse which is his equal for hill-work, and such a condition as "over in the knees" is unknown.

They skirted the town, then cut in to the road perhaps a mile beyond the palace gates. Dick glanced at the trail. Many horses had travelled it,

but in Karamania that meant nothing. Riding at a brisk gait, it was not long before they came in sight of the broad gulch across the plain cut by the river Plev.

The road led directly up to the bank which was precipitous. A heavy growth of bushes made it impossible for them to look down into the dry river-bed, but they could see the opposite bank, which was also steep and cut by numerous fissures and erosions. The plain beyond was thickly covered with brush similar to that upon their own side.

"Listen!" said Dick, raising his hand.

They reined in their horses, and approached the brink at a walk. From the top the trail went down diagonally, screened by dense bushes all of the way. A vista of the river-bed up-stream was visible; it was boulder-strewn with broad pools of standing water and banks of cobbles and drifted sand.

As they stopped to listen the princess' horse raised his head and pricked up his ears. Dick tapped him on the nose with his stick.

"Don't let him neigh," he whispered.

"There is somebody below," said the princess in a low voice.

Suddenly there came from the river-bed the shrill squeal of a horse when nipped by a comrade. Again the princess' pony raised its head to whinny, but a quick tug of the rein prevented it.

Dick slipped from his saddle and gave his rein to the girl.

"I'm going to reconnoitre," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

Pushing his way through the bushes Dick soon reached the edge of the gully and was able to look down through a screen of dry foliage. Directly under him were a dozen or odd horsemen. All were dismounted, sitting or sprawling close against the bank for the sake of the thin margin of shade it offered from the mid-day sun. Their horses were clustered in a little bunch, their heads hanging low, half asleep. Many tracks in the bed of the river marked the course of the trail which led down-stream for a short distance before ascending the opposite bank. The troopers themselves were of Hamdi Pasha's Montenegrin squadron.

But the feature which set Dick's usually normal pulse to pounding was the fact that a projection of the near bank completely hid from the troopers the point where the trail descended into the river-bed. A short distance above the river curved, and Dick saw at a glance that if they could steal quietly down, turning up-stream at the bottom and keeping in the loose sand close to the bank, they might pick their way along unseen until they found a spot where they could ascend the opposite side, which, being low in places and deeply eroded, seemed very possible.

He stole quietly back to the princess. She had

thrown aside the *all'antica* and her clear olive face shone a marble white against the black hood. Her eyes were half veiled by their long lashes and there were dark shadows under them.

"Here comes Hamdi," she said, in a low voice, and made a gesture toward Suruk.

Behind them the sandy road led straight away for a long stretch, then curved around the base of the low hill on which stood Hamdi's palace. Beyond this hill a swirl of white dust swept up over the dull green band of the olive trees.

"You are right. That's a troop of horse travelling fast. He's found out that we turned back." He drew his big revolver.

"What now?" asked the princess lifelessly.

"Go straight down to the river and turn upstream. Keep as close to the bank as you can. Don't make a sound. You go first."

The princess obeyed; they started down the slope, the horses' hoofs making no noise in the deep sand. At the bottom they stole quietly along the bank and had almost reached the bend when the princess' horse tossed its head and neighed.

"Run for it!" said Dick. "First chance you get go up the other bank and ride!"

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw a trooper run out from behind the projecting bank, stare for a moment in his direction, and then rush for the horses with a shout. After him flocked the others; in a twinkling all were mounted and in pursuit.

The princess had darted ahead, her wiry little

horse flying up the rock-strewn river-bed like an antelope. At every bound she distanced Dick, who was hanging behind.

"Get up the bank the first chance!" he shouted after her. "Don't look back!"

The Montenegrins were good-sized men on large horses; they were armed with carbines, but made no attempt to use them. Perhaps the pace was too hot; perhaps they had been instructed to capture their prisoners alive; most probably it was because of their natural preference for their own particular and hereditary weapon, the yataghan.

Dick swung in his saddle ready to shoot, his pony picking its way cleverly amongst the rocks with never a slip or stumble and no slackening of the pace. Seeing that his pursuers intended, like their comrades that same morning, to stick to the steel, he saved his fire for close quarters.

Up the river-bed they dashed, the wonderful horses leaping boulders and débris, splashing across the standing pools or plunging heavily through the soft sand and gravel. Surefooted, as are all their breed, the pace was nevertheless too hot for the trail. A horse among the Montengrins fell, flinging its rider against the rocks, another went down; neither of the men got up. A moment later one of the horses leading the pursuit went very lame, running almost on three legs. His rider checked him with a savage tug, leaped to the ground, unslung his carbine and fired, but the bullet flew wide.

The princess was rapidly increasing her lead; she

was better mounted than any of the others and Karamanian, which is to say, a part of her horse. Two of the troopers were gaining on Dick, and the foremost when within a dozen yards began to unsling his carbine. As he was struggling to get the strap over his head, Dick aimed between the pony's eyes and fired. The gully roared from the reverberation, and horse and rider plunged into one of the standing pools.

Dick turned at a cry from the princess and saw her swing her pony sharply toward the bank. The heat and dryness of the air had opened a diagonal crevice forming a little shelf which ran from the bottom to the top. As a path, it looked possible for a dog or a mountain-sheep. But the princess' pony did not hesitate an instant; up he went, skipping like a *moufflon* from side to side wherever a foothold was offered, reaching the top without mishap. On the brink the princess reined in and stood looking down upon the chase beneath.

"Ride for it!" yelled Dick, waving his revolver.

Two of the Montenegrins had overhauled him; one, who had taken the other side of the gully, was galloping abreast, waiting for a chance to close in. Dick rose in his stirrups and fired, but his pony swerved in its tracks and he missed. He fired again, and saw the man sway in his saddle. A third shot brought down the pony. At the same moment there came a report almost in his ear and he felt the wind of a bullet on his cheek. Swinging about, he fired

point-blank into the chest of a large man whose horse's head was almost at his elbow, and saw the trooper's eyes open wide as he gripped the wound with both hands and pitched out of the saddle.

Then Dick put his pony at the rift in the bank and the game little beast went at it like a cat, clawing his way up in a shower of loose clay and stones. But there were some fifty pounds of difference in the weights of Dick and the princess. Half-way to the top the shelf began to cave; he felt it going and flung himself out of the saddle, landing a-sprawl on the steep bank while the pony slid back into the gully on the top of a small avalanche.

Panting and breathless, Dick scrambled to the top, running back from the edge as the troopers coming rapidly up stream began to fire. In the tumble the revolver had flown from his hand, leaving him weaponless except for the yataghan shoved through his sash.

The princess had waited. Her face was pale and her light eyes almost black.

"Get up behind me," said she.

"No I wont!" panted Dick. "You ride for it!"

"What will *you* do?"

"No matter. I'll stop here."

"Surrender?"

"Yes."

The princess laughed mirthlessly. "Do you think they would take you alive—now?" she asked, with contempt.

"I dunno. That's my lookout. You go on, d'ye hear?"

The princess looked at him through her half-closed lids. There was a crimson spot in either cheek.

"I prefer to stay."

Dick looked at her angrily.

"You do, hey?" He peered down into the gully; the Montenegrins were riding back at a gallop, leaving two men on guard.

"Don't be a fool!" cried the princess, "or at least, don't be any more of a fool than you can help. We've got five minutes' start. Get up behind."

"It's no good. They'd catch us in three kilometres. That pony isn't up to carrying double. Thanks all the same. But for heaven's sake, go! You can make it easily alone."

"I prefer to stay."

"But why, for the Lord's sake?"

"Can't you guess?" The princess' voice was like ice.

"No, unless you want to see me killed."

"That's it!"

Dick shrugged, turned away, threw out both hands, and spat on the ground.

"Oh, all right. I guess you belong in the *hareem-lick* after all."

From down the gully a bugle rang out, faint but clear. Dick paused to listen. Both looked in that

direction and saw a great swirl of dust eddying above the tops of the bushes. His face set.

"You won't have long to wait," said he. "Here comes Hamdi."

"And you will not get up behind?"

"No, thank you. I wouldn't now at any price. It would be a mean trick to spoil your fun."

"You know what to expect from Hamdi," said the princess.

"Yes. So do you, don't you?"

A flame leaped from the girl's light eyes; she gripped her crop, half raising it as if to strike. Dick gave a short laugh.

"Go ahead," said he. "Countess von Essingen said that you'd beat me before the day was over."

"She said that?" demanded the princess furiously.

"Gad, she did—and she was right!"

"I *will* beat you!" she cried, and struck at him with the stick. Dick twisted it from her hand.

"How do you dar're!" cried the girl, stranglingly, and at the words Dick saw a vivid picture of their past. To him there came, as it had to the princess at their second meeeting, the vision of a grape-arbour through which the warm Swiss sunlight was filtered in bands of gold. He saw the slim, white-faced, lurid-eyed, passion-riven figure of a girl, her smoke-coloured hair in fine curling wisps about her broad forehead, her white teeth flashing;

and heard the same words: "How do you dar're—give me my v'vip! I am the Princess Lilear!"

He said now, as he had said then:

"You may be the Princess Lilear—but you're an awful little goose!" Then he added: "Ride along; there's a good girl. I was a fool to take you seriously. Listen!"

Again the distant bugle rang out.

The princess had turned her shoulder to him.

"Wish I had my gun," said Dick wistfully. "There's a lot I'd like to do for brother Hamdi before I quit." He peered cautiously over the edge of the bank. "But there are a couple of johnnies down there!"

Suddenly a shadow crossed his weather-hardened face. He drew the yataghan from his sash and turned to the princess.

"Here they come! For God's sake, ride along!" he cried.

CHAPTER IX

THE troop of Razamachi's Akindschis, sixty strong, jogging easily on the road to Podoni, just two days late, thanks to the thoroughness of Hamdi Pasha, fell in with General Kostovo and his party not far from the scene of the attack of Hamdi's Montenegrins.

Leaving half of the force under their colonel, Razamachi Bey, to act as an escort to the Countess von Essingen and her wounded brother, Kostovo himself, at the head of the other half, had swept like a whirlwind up the valley on the trail of the Princess Lilear.

Almost to Suruk they fell in with Hamdi Pasha and his troop riding to the relief of his victims. The strength of Hamdi's force far exceeded that of his adversary, but the Ottoman, his dish being not yet cooked, advanced alone to parley with the rugged old hillman, and Kostovo, seeing himself outnumbered and anxious for the safety of the princess, accepted with a hidden grin the apologies of the other for all that had occurred and his violent protestations that the attack was entirely without his knowledge and sanction.

All of this, Kostovo took as one takes a nauseous but necessary drug, but he strongly advised Hamdi

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to abandon his relief expedition, saying that it would be certain to precipitate a conflict between his troop and that of Razamachi.

The Ottoman, having important affairs on hand in Karoz, whither he was setting out when met by the princess and Dick, and more than suspecting his simple-minded old adversary of giving this advice because he wished him to do the opposite, held on therefore to Karoz, leaving Razamachi Bey to conduct his party in peace to Istria. Hamdi felt that the situation lay within the hollow of his hand and that if properly managed, Karamania might be his without the striking of a blow.

General Kostovo, holding his wild Karamanians with much difficulty from flying at the throats of their hereditary foes, resumed his march, secretly wondering what extraordinary string of lies Dick had told to Hamdi, and admiring the cleverness which had kept the wily Turk from guessing the identity of the princess.

Without drawing rein he swept through Suruk, scattering the howling and dancing and praying fanatics like rats before a pack of terriers, and although Razamachi had already informed him as to the *djehad* which was afoot, his heart sank as he quickly estimated the numerical strength of the Moslem horde.

Before the scattered devotees of Islam knew that a troop of the heretics whom they were gathering to slay was in their midst, the Akindschis were gone

again, leaving only a few wrecked and scattered booths—sheer mischief on the part of the brown, wiry little troopers—and a score of dervishes howling for other reasons than those of their ritual.

Almost to the sunken bed of the Plev, the sound of distant firing had reached their ears, and on arriving at the gully they met the Montenegrins picking their way back among the stones to take up the chase on the plain beyond. Kostovo, guessing instinctively what was afoot, had loosed his swift riders on these and left not one man alive.

So it was the clear, distant note of the Akindschis' bugle instead of Hamdi's which had reached Dick's ears as he stood, grim-faced and yataghan in hand, awaiting the final struggle in which he knew no quarter would be given. When a moment later there came the noise of a faint but rapid fusillade he was sorely puzzled.

"Now, what the deuce is that?" he said to himself, but aloud.

The princess, sitting her pony tensely, looked at him with a bitter smile.

"I think you've blundered out again," said she.

Dick's face turned very pale under its tan.

"You mean——" he began thickly, then stopped.

"It's not probable that they're fighting among themselves," said the princess.

Three quick reports rang out from the gully beneath. There came a rattle among the stones. Peering over the edge, Dick saw two Montenegrin

troopers, who had been stationed there, aim and fire down-stream. The next instant they had wheeled their horses and dashed up the river-bed and out of sight. Quickly following, came the clash and clatter of flying hoofs; three small, brown, wiry troopers swept up the gulch, their superb horses springing amongst the stones like running deer.

Hot on their heels came another, who, to Dick's amazement, suddenly whipped up his short carbine and apparently regardless of the fearful pace and the dangerous character of the trail dropped his rein on his horse's neck and poising himself beautifully, opened a hot fire upon the fugitives. Then in a second they were gone, and farther up the gully echoed with the ring of scampering hoofs and the detonations of the carbine.

"The Akindschis!" cried the princess. "Razamachi's Akindschis!"

"My word!" gasped Dick. "What riding!"

"They're Karamanians."

"They're wonders," he answered. "Are they all like that?"

"A thousand of them," said the princess proudly.

"We had that last fight for nothing," said Dick.

"Never mind; you blundered out, but—but I'm glad." She turned her face away.

"War," said Dick, "is a series of blunders. Successful war is a series of successful blunders."

The princess did not answer. Dick had expected to hear: "Then you ought to be successful," or

some similar remark. He glanced at her quickly; the princess' shoulders were moving convulsively. It struck Dick with a shock of some peculiar emotion that, after all, she was only a woman who had just passed through a frightful ordeal.

He stepped to the side of her pony.

"I've been a brute," he said. "Don't cry. I'm sorry."

The princess did not look at him, but her shoulders stopped shaking.

"I think," said Dick, slowly, "that you are the pluckiest and gamest woman in the world. I'm proud to be in your service, even if you are not proud to have me."

The princess' head turned slowly; her long eyes looked at him aslant.

"Of course you hate me," said she, with an indifference which was not quite real. "You say that to please me. In your heart you think that I am just what Hamdi said, 'a Karamanian hill-woman.'"

"I think that you are a wonder," said Dick. "I don't hate you. Neither do you hate me. You have a hot temper and you were furiously angry with me, but you did not want to see me killed. I know. You stopped here because you would not leave me to finish alone. Your sort don't run away from a comrade. We have both been very foolish, but we've been through two tight places to-day. Let's be friends."

The princess tried to speak but failed. Suddenly she looked up.

"Here they come!" she cried, and there was a joyous lilt in her voice, which for some peculiar reason brought the colour to Dick's face.

"Will you be friends?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the princess swiftly and in a low voice. She gave him her hand.

"American men do sometimes kiss girl's hands," said Dick, with a smile, and brushed it with his lips. Their eyes met and the colour rushed to the faces of both.

"Look!" cried the princess, pointing with her crop.

A squad of the Akindschis were coming toward them at a gallop. Ahead of them rode Kostovo, who, as he sighted the princess, threw up his arms with a shout, then turned and spoke to his bugler. The young man fell out of ranks, reined in sharply, and raising his bugle to his lips sent the "rally" ringing out across the plain.

"Bravo!" cried Kostovo. "You're found. You're unhurt? I knew you couldn't be far. My men are scattered looking for you."

"You came in the nick of time," said Dick. "They had my horse and my gun."

Kostovo laughed. "Like the old days," said he, "when we hunted brigands together and once or twice got hunted—yes?"

There came the clatter of hoofs beneath, and they

looked down to see the four Akindschis returning. They were driving two riderless horses ahead of them, and on the saddle of one there was a broad smear of blood. Being Karamanian, the princess did not shudder.

"Did Hamdi let you pass without a fight?" asked Dick.

Kostovo growled. "Yes. He outnumbered us two to one, and I was anxious about you two or there might have been a discord."

"And Suruk?" asked the princess.

"Those dogs are howling yet; my boys came through them roughly—but what a lot of them there are! *Tchk, tchk, tchk!*" His swarthy face became grave.

For a few minutes they talked, until the searching squads had all come in.

"And now," said Kostovo, "for Istria."

Dick mounted one of the captured horses and they started, travelling swiftly across the plain.

"If Hamdi takes the trail after his friends," said Kostovo, "there will be a fight. Colonel Razamachi Bey is an impetuous man. Between you and me he is not quite civilised. He would be outnumbered almost two to one."

"These Montenegrins would be useful fighting men," said Dick, "if one could make them use something besides steel."

Kostovo nodded. "They love the yataghan," said he. "Knowing that, we have trained our

Akindschis to use their carbines and revolvers." He swung in his saddle, glanced back at his command, then turned to Dick with a glow of pride. "Look at them," said he; "they are the finest cavalry in Europe or Asia; I don't know your cowboys or the Canadian police; whatever the men, I will wager that they are not mounted as beautifully as my Akindschis! There have been no soldiers so mounted since the staff of Alexander the Great! They could ride fifty miles, fight a battle, and ride back again. Their horses are picked from the whole country, and there are a great many horses in Karamania."

"I have felt better about our cause since I saw them ride up that river-bed," said Dick.

"The men are intelligent, and like most small, quick people, very good shots. They are not bigoted like the Montenegrins who forget their carbines and will fight with nothing but the steel because their father fought so before them. The Akindschis shoot naturally." He groaned. "If only we had not lost all of that ammunition! I will not dare to tell them that there is scarcely ammunition for two days of fighting."

"Don't tell them!" said Dick sharply. "Tell the officers, of course, but don't tell the men. They would be beaten before the start."

CHAPTER X

It was late in the afternoon when the cavalcade rode into Istria. The town is high in the hills, built of a white native marble, and when the afternoon sun is shining full upon it can be seen as a gleaming silver spot against the brown of the mountains as far as Karoz, twenty miles across the plain.

The palace is built within the walls of the old Genoese château, the greater part of which is still in an admirable state of preservation. The keep is almost intact, and four of the great towers are standing; the ramparts and dry moat have always been kept in a state of repair.

The new palace, which is built of marble and is the only part used as a dwelling, rests against the outer wall; between it and the entrance the whole enclosure is planted in olive trees with grape arbours and flower-beds, the freshest, sweetest spot in all of Karamania. At the foot of the hill, just under the shadow of the fortress walls, are some ancient barracks, at the present time occupied by the Akindschis. The town itself is on a slightly lower level than the castle, and through its centre flows one of the few streams in the country which endure throughout the summer months.

The morning after their arrival, as Dick was re-

turning through the garden from a visit to the barracks made with General Kostovo, he found Edith standing by a little fountain under the olive trees.

"How is Jim?" he asked when he had greeted her. "Doing well?"

"I'm sure of it. He does nothing but swear. Coming here yesterday after that dreadful fight, he was so crazy over the troopers who escorted us that it gave him fever."

"It's a good thing he's out of mischief."

Edith laughed. "The Greek doctor whom Hamdi Pasha sent up from Karoz says that there will be no fighting."

"Why not?"

"Because, my filibustering young friend," said Edith, looking straight into his eyes, "it appears that the Karamanians have suffered a great blow in the loss of all of their ammunition for the campaign, which was destroyed in the fire of the custom-house at Podoni."

Dick grinned. "Hamdi's giving that out, is he?"

"And so, Dicky, you won't have to marry your princess, after all."

"Eh, what!"

Edith's nymphlike face was alive with mischief. "Don't pretend, Dicky-bird; I know all about it. Kostovo told me yesterday after you two had gone." She laughed. "It really wasn't fair to pump the simple-hearted old chap, but—I wanted to know.

Besides, he really did not have to be pumped; he *siphoned.*"

Dick laughed vexedly. "The drivelling old fool!" was his polite comment.

Edith looked at him searchingly.

"Tell me, Dick, dear, you're not really going to fight, are you?"

"We certainly are."

"When?" asked Edith, her face a shade paler.

"I can't tell."

Edith's eyes half closed; she pushed a pebble into the fountain with the toe of her slipper.

"Then you'll have to marry the princess?"

"Somebody's got to marry her. The sheiks won't have her for queen without. They're afraid she might marry Hamdi, I guess, or some other nice gentleman like him; some of this rotten Servian gang, perhaps. At any rate, she's got to be married."

Edith looked at him narrowly.

"I knew you liked danger, Dicky, but I didn't think that you were as keen for it as that."

"Oh, pshaw! It's just a bluff to fool the sheiks. If our movement is successful, Kostovo's first act will be to find her a husband."

"But suppose you fail?"

Dick grinned. "Then the ceremony is null and void because, you see, I would only be the proxy of somebody who does not exist."

"But I don't see it at all. Better let that part

of it alone, Dicky; it's more dangerous than the other."

"I believe you. She hates me like the devil."

"Really?" The long lashes half hid Edith's hazel eyes. She was watching Dick without looking at him. "What makes you think so?"

"Straws," said Dick, with a grin, "show which way the wind blows. You said that she would beat me before the day was done. You are a clever woman. Look at that." He rolled back his khaki sleeve, baring a big-boned forearm. Across the clean-cut, bulging muscles ran two dark discolourations and the whole arm was slightly swollen.

A savage little gleam shone from Edith's eyes; then the colour rushed into her face and she threw back her head and laughed.

"The little savage! Her English civilisation is only skin-deep, after all. She's Oriental and that's a different race, really. Was she in such a rage?"

"It was rather more than pique."

"So you think that she hates you?"

"That arm is not a mark of affection. In the last scrimmage I got unhorsed scrambling up a bank and lost my gun in the shuffle. She had plenty of time to get away but she wouldn't go."

"Why?"

"She said she wanted to see me killed. For a second she meant it!"

"The savage!" Edith reached for Dick's arm,

still bare, and passed her cool hands gently over the bruises.

"Orientals, no matter where educated, never become quite civilised, my dear. There's Hamdi."

"Hamdi's a Turcoman." Dick moved his arm restlessly, but Edith still held it in her small, firm hand.

"She's practically the same."

"Not exactly. Not at all, in fact. Hamdi's forefathers came from Asia Minor; her's came from Southern Europe. She's fierce and warm, but not crafty and cold-blooded."

"But she's cruel." Edith ran her fingers gently over the bruises and looked up at Dick. His eyes met hers; the colour crept into his face. Edith's ever-varying expression changed again; her long lashes swept up, her face grew rosy. Her seductive mouth was half open, lips apart, showing both rows of perfect teeth. The hazel eyes were misty. Gervex could have found no better study for one of his wood nymphs.

"Why do you look at me so, Dicky?" she murmured.

"I don't know," he answered almost roughly. "You're a siren. No wonder you leave trouble in your trail. You ought to be locked up."

"Dick, dear!" Her face was still that of the nymph, now grieving at the death of a flower.

"You can't help it, I suppose."

"What *are* you talking about, Dicky?"

"You know well enough. Be frank for once."

Mischief chased grief from the face of the nymph.

"I will, Dick. I can't always keep from showing when I feel things."

"Such as——"

"Sympathy"—the mischievous face grew suddenly intense—"and the man in you! You make me feel—feminine. What's the use of pretending? You always have done so. You're the only man who ever has, or ever could."

"And yet you married the count."

"Wise women don't marry for that, Dicky."

"Well, then——"

"Oh, dear!" Edith's low voice was despairing. "You're not a man at all! you're a Gatling-gun. You might kill a man—a lot of men—but you couldn't love a woman. You're a splendid fighter, Dicky-bird, but you'd be an awfully poor lover." She looked at him intently. "You haven't the right-coloured eyes for a lover, you know; they're cold, a bit cruel, soldier's eyes, like Kitchener's. Then you *are* a bit of a brute, you know. I wonder if there is any tenderness in you." She looked at him pensively.

"Don't know. You had a chance to find out, but you wanted a coronet more. Now, I'm about to be married to a crown and"—he grinned—"I expect my head will rest dam' uneasy."

Edith burst into a laugh. She turned her face

up to him with her most mischievous and inviting expression. They were quite hidden in the olives.

"Oh, you great boy! Will you never grow up? No wonder your poor princess is puzzled and angry and whacks you with a stick. Sometimes I'm tempted to whack you myself!" She laid her hand on either of his shoulders and looked up into his face, chin tilted and lips curved in a teasing smile. "Tell me honestly, Dicky—you may lie if you like, because I'm sure to know—aren't you just the least bit, just a *wee* bit *épris* of your princess?"

Dick glanced down at the tempting face. His breath came quickly. Edith felt it and laughed caressingly.

"There, you see," she said, "the mere mention of her makes your heart throb; and you're getting really pale, Dicky—for you!" She laughed again, looking at him with up-curved lips and misty, half-closed eyes. "Now you're beginning to blush! Blush away, Dicky, you look so nice! So you really *do* think that she is rather fascinating? So do I. But she's an Oriental, Dicky; she wouldn't understand chivalry. Try whipping her!" She threw back her head and laughed, showing her pretty round throat.

Dick made a brusque movement to free his shoulders from the clasp of her two strong little hands, but she clung tightly.

"Not till you confess, Dicky-bird." Her voice was very low and the expression of her eyes almost

bacchanalian; they suggested a tryst in the greenwood with the smell of ferns and the ripple of clear water; the freshness of her was like a bank of wood-violets. "Come, Dicky," she said, "do you like her very much? Answer and I'll let you go."

"Don't be silly!" snapped Dick. He took both of her bare forearms in his hands and pushed her away.

All of the mischief, and something else, flooded Edith's face again.

"Poor Dicky! So shocked and embarrassed and I to be teasing him!" She looked at him with an expression of mock pity, and as he freed her arms, she clasped her small hands and tilted her head slightly to one side. "I'm so sorry."

"Then go away."

"Do you love your princess?"

"No; and she hates me as a dervish hates a bath!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" The nymph flew back again. The upturned face dimpled and the pretty lips puckered. "If that is true, you may kiss me, Dicky."

"I don't want to kiss you."

"Yes, you do; and I want to be kissed."

"You ought to be spanked! Go away!"

"I will not." Edith glanced about to see that there was no one in sight and the next instant found herself in his arms, crushed, breathless, half stifled in a caress so rough and savage as to seem careless

if it left her bruised, dishevelled and smothered. Yet, even while fighting for her breath, she made no effort to escape. Then suddenly she felt herself free again, tottering on her feet, swaying giddily, while Dick, rather pale, stood with folded arms and a smile lurking under his long moustache, regarding her maliciously.

"There!" said he. "Now are you satisfied?"

Edith looked at him ruefully; she wore the expression of a nymph who had carried a greenwood jest too far. She passed her delicate hand lightly over herself; there was a look of much anxiety upon her charming face.

"Anything broken?" asked Dick.

"No, my dear; nothing but a collar-bone and three ribs!" She burst into a laugh. "You're less cold than I thought you were, aren't you, Dicky-mine?"

"I can be quite torrid when improperly stoked. Better leave it alone."

"I shall." She tilted her head. "Is my face on straight?"

"Yes, but it won't be if you stand there and look at me like that. Now run along."

There was the sound of approaching steps and General Kostovo appeared, coming up the path through the olive trees.

"We are to have a visitor to-day," he said, after greeting them. "You would never guess who it is that is coming."

"Hamdi Pasha?" asked Edith.

Kostovo looked at her in surprise.

"But how did you ever guess?"

"Instinct."

"You are right; Hamdi is coming. Last night he sent a courier from Karoz, asking that he might be granted safe conduct to call and make his apologies to all of us for the unfortunate 'accident' which befell us on the road." The old fellow grinned.

"And you gave it?" growled Dick.

"Yes. To tell the truth, I thought it just as well to keep up the pretence of friendly relations as long as possible." He glanced at Edith. "Countess von Essingen is one of us now."

Dick flushed, but said nothing.

CHAPTER XI

EARLY in the afternoon Hamdi Pasha made his call. There was quite a large party taking coffee in the garden of the palace when he arrived; a party which included Colonel Razamachi, several of the other officers and friends of the princess, for there is nothing Turkish in the social customs of the Karamanians, whose women occupy the relative position of Europeans in their society.

No trace of conscious guilt was apparent in the manner of the splendid-looking Ottoman as, escorted by General Kostovo, he approached the group. Stepping in front of the princess, he bowed low, touched his fingers to the path, then raised them to his forehead, his mouth, his heart, carrying out so much in full the idea of the picturesque Turkish salutation as to leave visible particles of dust at each of these cardinal points.

"I have come," he said, in his rich voice, speaking in perfect French, "not to ask forgiveness, which would be too much, but to offer my poor body in reparation for the wrongs done by my followers."

"It would have been difficult for us to believe," said the princess, "that his excellency, Hamdi Pasha, should knowingly offer such a welcome to his neighbours, as well as to guests and strangers in Karamania."

Hamdi renewed his protestations, volubly.

"As to the last attack," he concluded, "of which I am very loth to speak, that was a mischance for which I feel scarcely to blame. Had the person who escorted Princess Lilear"—his fine eyes rested malevolently upon Dick—"been frank with me concerning the identity of his companion, I should, of course, have supplied an escort, which would have ensured her safe conduct. The outposts stationed in the ravine were there to turn back any of the Mohammedan element who have gathered in Suruk for a religious festival, and who I feared might be tempted to do some mischief to my unorthodox neighbours. None the less, their mistake was of course deplorable."

"It does not matter," said Dick grimly, "they will not make it again."

Hamdi did not seem to hear. He turned to Edith.

"Dear Countess von Essingen, can you ever forgive me? And your brother, my dear friend Gordon? Tell me that his condition is not serious and relieve me of a terrible suspense."

"It is hard to forgive such a blunder, Hamdi Pasha," said Edith. "My brother is doing very well. The doctor whom you so thoughtfully sent from Karoz assures us that he is in no danger."

After a few moments of conversation, Hamdi asked if he might see the wounded man, and Edith conducted him to her brother's apartment which

was in a wing of the palace, commanding a magnificent view of the Plains of Karoz. Half an hour later when they returned to the garden, Edith paused at the head of the path.

"Tell me," she said quickly, "are you really going to fight?"

Hamdi turned to her with the most perfect assumption of utter lack of comprehension upon his inscrutable, Oriental face.

"But, my dear countess," he began.

"Nonsense!" interrupted Edith, in a fierce little voice. "I know the situation. My brother and I have no wish to be cut to pieces here by your Mohammedan fanatics from Suruk."

Hamdi threw out his hands. "Nor I to have you," he continued, speaking rapidly. "I did not anticipate any fighting until I learned the identity of Osborne Pasha. He is well known in Macedonia, and if he is in command here we will not get through without a struggle, unless——" He shot a quick, analytic glance at Edith.

"Unless what?"

"Unless I can obtain the custody of the Princess Lilear."

"And what then?" asked Edith tensely.

"There would be no uprising."

"You are sure?"

"There is no doubt. She is the last of the Karamanian ruling family. This old Kostovo would have no cause, and as it is they are crippled and

almost without ammunition. The whole thing would crumble."

"And many lives would be saved," said Edith thoughtfully.

Hamdi's eyes flashed. "Perfectly," said he. "It would avoid much bloodshed."

"If you were to obtain custody of the princess," asked Edith, "what would you do with her? Tell me the truth."

"I would send her immediately out of the country with a warning not to come back. Then I would take good care to see that she did not return for the next twelve months. After that it would not matter."

"If I were sure——" Edith began.

A quick flash of intelligence crossed Hamdi's face. He leaned slightly toward her.

"It is in your power, Countess von Essingen," said he, "to prevent much unnecessary bloodshed."

"But what could I do? What do you mean?"

"If to-night," said Hamdi, dropping his voice, "you could persuade the princess to walk with you to the far end of this enclosure——"

"No! No!" said Edith, with a shudder.

"To walk down to the northwest tower. The view from the top of it should be very fine. One sees the plain sleeping far beneath in the starlight and the lights of Karoz sparkling against the dark mountains beyond. One really does not need to ascend the tower"—his voice, rich, deep, almost caressing,

grew lower in tone,—"there is a little door in the wall beside the tower which looks out directly over the valley. There is a steep path leading down from it."

Edith shuddered.

"It would be treachery."

"It would be a treachery which would save a great many lives, among them those of General Kostovo and Osborne Pasha."

"Perhaps."

"The chances are strongly against Osborne Pasha."

"That's when we Anglo-Saxons fight best."

"Allah! I believe you! But one can't fight treachery."

Edith flushed. "Whose treachery?" she asked.

"These Karamanians are wild cattle; they will not be driven for long by a foreigner. They will turn and gore him."

"He is a good driver. He can take care of himself. But what of the princess?"

"A girl like that to rule these folk! Bah!"

"But if she were in your keeping, dear Hamdi Pasha?"

Hamdi threw out both hands.

"No harm shall come to her. Until she leaves the country she will be in my *hareemlick* under safe guard."

"Against Hamdi Pasha?"

"*Sapristi!* For myself, I would far rather that

she were in England than in my palace. She is the core of the discord. Besides, if any harm came to her through me I would not live to see another sunset. You need have no fear."

Edith studied the toe of her slipper.

"Come, dear countess," said Hamdi, "they are looking this way. Be reasonable and save your friends from the results of their folly. Just a walk in the garden, near the northwest tower, between dark and midnight——"

Edith turned away, then glanced at him over her shoulder.

"I will try," said she.

At eleven o'clock that night there was to be a council-of-war. General Kostovo had already demonstrated to his compatriots the advantages to be derived from the services of so trained and experienced a campaigner as Osborne Pasha. He had told them also that unless Dick were given absolute command of the Karamanian forces, he would refuse to have anything to do with the affair and would leave the country forthwith. This argument, backed by the mutual jealousy existing among themselves, had finally carried the day. The question of the princess' marriage was not raised; all present well knew the real motive of the Mohammedan gathering at Suruk; there was no longer any alternative but to fight; the future dynasty would have to be adjusted later.

After dinner Dick spent an hour with Kostovo, who primed him regarding the internal affairs of the country and the dispositions of the leading Karamanians, to all of which he listened attentively, asking but few questions.

"We will meet here, then, at eleven," said Kostovo, their interview finished.

Dick nodded and rising went out into the garden. The night was clear but without a moon, and a great host of stars shone brightly in a sky of the deepest tourmaline, for in Karamania the heavens hold their depth of colour throughout the night.

A white-clad figure was standing by the fountain. Walking in that direction, Dick came upon the princess alone, looking into the clear pool.

"Will you let me join you, princess?" he asked.

"Yes, if you wish, Osborne Pasha," she answered, still looking into the pool.

"Are you trying to read the future?" He stepped to her elbow and looked into the water. "The Indian priests see pictures in places like that. What do you see?"

The princess shuddered.

"I see blood," she answered.

Dick did not at once answer; then he said:

"Yes. I am afraid there will be some blood."

The princess' dark eyes seemed to glow at him through the darkness.

"Do you think that it is worth it?" she asked. "Or hadn't you thought of that part of it?"

"I've thought a lot about it," Dick answered slowly. "If it were only for a crown or a monarchy or some selfish thing like that it would not be worth it. I would not fight for it. It would make me no better than a hired killer. But it's more."

"Yes," said the princess, "and it's inevitable."

"It's for civilisation. Turkey is being dismembered; it's bound to be dismembered. It's a clog to the surrounding civilisation. The whole past history of the nation is not merely written in blood like that of all nations more or less, but fairly swims in blood. Think of the slaughter that's attended every new dynasty, every new monarch for that matter. Think of the slaughter committed by the Janissaries, and then the slaughter of themselves, twenty thousand of them within two or three days."

"That's Islam."

"Yes; Hamdi's a Turcoman; if he gets Karamania the killing is only begun. If we can manage it, it's over. And what there is will be in clean warfare, and not through spite and greed and fanaticism and sheer bloodthirstiness. Yes, it's worth it."

There was a silence which lasted for several minutes. Then the princess said:

"I have not been fair to you."

"You thought that all I cared about was a fight?"

"Almost that."

"We're quits, I guess. I thought that you only

cared for your crown. What will you do when you get it?"

"*If* I get it?" asked the princess.

"No, *when* you get it. We'll get it for you."

"I shall *wear a cross* on it." The princess dropped her head.

"You'll make your nation Christian?"

"Yes. My people are Christian at heart. They're open-hearted. They're liberal."

"They laugh."

"They would be Christians now if it were not for their hatred of the Bulgarians of that faith. Since the Bulgarian Christians have refused to recognise the Oecumenical Patriarch they and the Macedonian Christians do nothing but cut each other's throats."

"*You* can't stop that."

"Kostovo will stop it. He is strongly anti-Mohammedan. There's not much that a woman can do, is there?"

Dick looked at her thoughtfully.

"No," he answered, "not in a country like this. It needs a man, a native. That's the only thing——" He paused.

"Yes?"

"That's what I hate about it all; I mean, putting you in and leaving you to handle a problem like that."

"Why?" asked the princess softly.

"I don't want you martyred."

"What do you care?"

"Don't talk like that," said Dick sharply. "Of course I care. I care a whole lot."

The princess laughed, but with a certain effort.

"Do you? You would not have cared yesterday."

"Yes, I would have," growled Dick.

"Even when I—when I struck you?" asked the princess, catching her breath.

"That was temper. I never gave it a thought; but some of the things you've said——"

"Made you angry?"

"No, hurt. I guess you were right when you said on the ship that it would not be so hard to hurt me."

The princess was silent. Her breath was coming rapidly, but Dick did not notice it. They were standing at the foot of a flight of stone steps leading up to the ramparts, having strolled there unconsciously as they talked.

"Let's go up and get the view," said Dick.

Without answering the princess mounted the steps, crossed the broad wall, and seated herself on the ramparts. Dick stood in front of her, staring down into the misty valley.

"But I have treated you badly, too," he went on, "I've said mean things. I'm sorry."

"Why did you do so?" asked the princess. "Because I taunted you?"

"Not altogether. I've been out of sorts. Do you want me to tell you why?"

"Yes," whispered the princess, "if—if you are free to do so."

"I am. You have a right to know. I'm in your service and you have first claim on me. It was because of—Countess von Essingen."

The princess caught her breath.

"I was in love with her once. She said she loved me, and then went and married another man—a beast. When she appeared on the scene the other day with her brother it—it upset me." He walked to the edge of the ramparts and stood for a moment looking out across the misty valley. Presently he turned. "It mixed me up. I didn't know. I had sort of an idea that I might be—still in love with her. But I'm not!"

After a little silence the princess said softly:

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Beyond a doubt? Anybody could see that she is in love with you. And perhaps if you were to see her——"

Dick interrupted her with a gesture of impatience.

"No, it's over; it's all finished; dead as an Egyptian mummy. I wasn't sure until to-day. Besides, she's not in love with me, as *I* understand it! I thought you had a right to know; and now that I've told you let's not speak of it again."

There was another long pause at the end of which the princess said in a voice which had a peculiar thrilling note:

"Thank you for telling me."

Suddenly she leaped up from the broad stone rampart and, turning, faced the valley. Her bosom was rising and falling rapidly and her face was turned up toward the starlit sky.

"Isn't it lovely?" she cried, in a low, rapturous voice. "Did you ever see anything sweeter than that great stretch of plain with the rolling hills and those jagged mountains against the purple sky? See how the mist hangs over the river-valley—and there is my star, that big, bright star! I call it mine, because I can see it through my window when I go to sleep." There was a lilt to her low-pitched voice like the note of a thrush at sunset.

From the wooded slope beneath them there came as if in answer the call of a nightingale.

"A *bulbul*," said the princess. She laid her hand softly on Dick's arm. "Listen, Osborne Pasha."

The bird finished its song. Another took it up, and soon a symphony of sweet, liquid notes arose from the velvety depths beneath.

The princess drew back and Dick, watching closely, saw her shudder.

"That is this country," she said. "One sees blood in the fountain and hears nightingales singing under the castle wall. Am I keeping you, Osborne Pasha?"

"You have not been, but I must go now. We are to have a council-of-war."

A musical voice floated up from the depths of the garden.

"Princess Lilear! Princess Lilear!"

"Good-night," said the princess softly. "That is Countess von Essingen. I promised to walk with her in the garden. She wants to see the old towers at night."

"Good-night," said Dick.

"Good-night! Coming, countess!" called the princess.

CHAPTER XII

Since her final words to Hamdi Pasha, the Countess von Essingen had been wading in deep waters.

She was not a treacherous woman, nor was she cruel. She loved laughter and mischief and gaiety, tender words, music, flowers, delicate perfumes, or a swift ride 'cross country in the face of a brisk wind. She was very much alive, warm, sensuous, compassionate and fierce, if need be. While without any particular ethical or moral code and unprincipled at heart as the wood-nymph which she so much resembled in other ways, she had her full share of the fair-mindedness which is the particular heritage of American women.

Moreover, while she could be very fierce, she was at the same time warm-hearted. Hamdi Pasha's insidious suggestion that she betray the Princess Lilear into his hands would only have aroused her ridicule and anger had it not been so adroitly offered. Edith had no conception of the Oriental ruthlessness of Ottoman character, nor did she appreciate what an utterly wild and uncivilised country she was in. She had seen a great deal of Hamdi, both in Paris, and on the Riviera. He was a friend of her brother's, and had once accompanied them on a motoring tour. She had thought of him only as a very attractive and finished man of the world,

Orientally picturesque, but at heart European. In his own country he might have had a harem and made pretence of the faith of Islam, but this was vague in her mind. At present he was involved in a dangerous political conspiracy which would result in violence and bloodshed if the Princess Lilear remained in the country.

To Edith's mind the princess' cause was already lost, but because Osborne Pasha was in command and because the man was a born and trained fighter and as obstinate as an army mule, Karamania was to be drenched in blood, the princess sent into penniless exile and the chances of Dick himself coming through alive were, in Edith's opinion, very slight. For the first time in her life it seemed to her that duty and self-interest walked side by side; and so she threw open her long French windows and stepped out into the soft, sweet-smelling night, with the stars sparkling overhead and the nightingales thrilling under the castle wall, and hardened her heart to betray her gracious hostess to the Turk.

As she stood on the edge of the terrace listening, a murmur reached her from the ramparts; she recognised Dick's low-pitched tones, then the soft voice of the princess. The task before her became less difficult. It was then that she called and a moment later saw Dick's dark figure outlined against the sky, as he walked along the ramparts to enter Kostovo's room which opened directly upon them. The princess came down the stone steps to meet her.

"How dark it is here under the trees!" exclaimed the princess. "We had better take a servant with a lantern."

"But that would spoil the whole effect."

"Perhaps you are right. We will do without. Besides, it is more thrilling and gruesome and creepy to go by ourselves in the dark, don't you think? How black it looks down there, and how far away!" She gave a nervous little laugh.

Edith peered into the black arcade under the low-branched olive trees. She could feel her resolution ebbing fast.

"Perhaps you would rather not go." She looked hopefully at the princess. Edith's bravery was all for the daytime and belonged to the rush of emotions, warm blood and sunlight. She hated the dark.

"I'm not afraid," answered the princess. "Besides, there is a sentry at the postern gate."

"Only one?"

The princess laughed.

"But is not one armed man enough—for ghosts?"

"There might be real things—savage men."

Edith was losing her head in her fright. The princess glanced at her in surprise.

"There's no danger of that. The big gates are shut."

"But the little path?"

"There's the sentry."

"He might be surprised and overcome."

"Not before he could give the alarm. Then all of the roads to Istria are watched."

Edith still hung back.

"What if there were enemies already in the town?" she began doubtfully. Her courage was coming back with the thought that Hamdi might have been unable to carry out his plan.

"That is not likely," said the princess, "but of course if you feel nervous—— But how odd that you should be afraid; you were so brave when we were attacked." She was trying to see Edith's face in the gloom.

"My—I'm not frightened now. I've always hated the dark. It's nothing. Let's go."

The princess turned toward a little path under the castle wall.

"Then let us go this way; you can see the other side of the fortress as it comes against the sky."

The entire circuit of the walls enclosed a space some three hundred yards in length and half as much in width, following the irregular outline of the flat top of a low hill. On three sides the slope was precipitous; the fourth, at a lower level, contained the entrance and was strongly fortified by twin towers and a dry moat. In the angle made by one of the towers and the wall there was a little gate from which a foot-path led down the side of the hill to the road beneath.

In front of the northwest tower the princess and

her guest paused and looked doubtfully into the black, forbidding entrance.

"It *is* dark," said the princess.

Edith could not speak; some sixth sense had suddenly told her that enemies were lurking in the black recesses close at hand. The last vestige of her courage deserted her.

"Let us go back," she whispered.

"Your are really frightened?"

"I am. I am terrified."

"But there is nothing to be afraid of."

"But there is—there is!"

"I'll call the sentry."

"Don't—don't speak—don't make a sound! Let's run!" She grasped the princess' wrist in a grip which only terror could give.

Some quality in her fright struck a chill through the princess. Pride alone kept her from panic. She laughed unsteadily.

"We are like two children afraid of the dark! We *mustn't* give way to it like this. There is no danger."

"We—don't—know."

"Let's be brave. I will call the sentry."

"Sh'h'h'h!"

"Come, then."

The princess looked furtively over her shoulder. The terrifying dark hemmed them in; it was like the shroud of some nightmare hiding awful things which were nameless.

"There's really nothing to fear," repeated the princess unsteadily. "Let us find the steps and go upon the ramparts. It is lighter," she gave a frightened little laugh, "and we can walk back along the top to the palace."

But Edith knew that there was much to fear. They were standing directly in front of the black entrance to the tower and her starting eyes seemed held by some invisible power to the impalpable interior; then as she stared her hyper-acute hearing caught the faintest rustle from within. Her breath came in a shuddering gasp. Her knees swayed under her.

Twenty paces to their left the rugged outlines of the castle wall were sharply defined against the starlit sky; their substance was vague, deep, impenetrable, but against the sombre mass there was visible an arched glimmer of light.

"That is the postern-gate," said the princess, in Edith's ear, for neither seemed able to raise their voices above a whisper. "There is always a sentry stationed just outside. Let us go there and call him to take us back."

"No! No! Let us——" Edith's voice failed, and both hands flew to her heart. From the inky depths of the tower there had come a distinct metallic sound, followed by a rustle. The princess heard it, also.

"What was that?" she asked sharply, then forced a laugh. "Come, countess, we are on the verge of

hysterics. Come with me to the gate and I will call the sentry. That was only a rat."

She turned toward the postern. Edith moved unsteadily after her. There was another rustle from the tower. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw one dark figure, then another, a third, and yet a fourth glide silently from the doorway to be swallowed up in the toneless gloom of the wall. She covered her mouth with both hands to choke back the scream which seemed bursting from her chest. Her feet refused to move, and she swayed from side to side.

Suddenly the princess gripped her wrist.

"*Mon Dieu!*" The girl's voice was choked, half-strangled. "*Mon Dieu!* what is that thing? Look! Look!" The words came between her set teeth.

Edith, her senses reeling, looked down at the path. Almost at their feet, barely distinguishable from the grey stones, lay the stark body of a man. The pale glimmer from the postern struck upward with a dull, metallic sheen from his white face and the black pool in which he lay.

"Treason!" muttered the princess. "It is the sentry!" She looked wildly about her. "Come, quickly!"

But the countess had sunk to the ground. The princess leaned over her, and as she stooped there was the quick shuffle of feet upon the pavement, a sudden rush of bulky shapes. The scream which burst from the princess' lips was stifled in the heavy

kaftan thrown over her head, while her arms were pinned to her side with irresistible force. She felt herself swung bodily from the ground; the *kaftan* smothered her; and then, flying through infinite space, she passed gently into oblivion.

CHAPTER XIII

THE council-of-war had proceeded none too smoothly. Kostovo's demand in behalf of Osborne Pasha that he was to be invested with full command of the Karamanian army, crippled as it was from the loss of the ammunition, had been reluctantly agreed to, but on Dick's proceeding to outline his plan of campaign, he was met by immediate opposition.

"But that is not war, Osborne Pasha," exclaimed one of the generals, "to sit still, penned up here in our hills drilling our soldiers with empty guns for an indefinite number of weeks while Hamdi proclaims himself King of Karamania and launches against us his riff-raff of fanatics and turns loose his Montenegrin hirelings to drive off our horses! That is not war."

"No," said Dick, "it's diplomacy. Do you want to go to war with empty guns?"

"But if we strike quickly and sharply!" cried Colonel Razamachi Bey.

"At what?" asked Dick. "If we strike at Suruk there is still Karoz, and if we strike at Karoz there is still Suruk, and if we strike at both Istria would be left unprotected."

"Not entirely, Osborne Pasha," said Kostovo. "We have a full regiment of infantry."

"You mean you have the men and you have the arms, such as they are, old muskets and the like. That is not a regiment; that is a mob. Your infantry have never performed a single evolution as a regiment. You have ten thousand more, for that matter, in the hills around Istria, but of what use are they as troops?"

"There are our five hundred Sepahis," ventured an elderly officer.

"Who are like the Akindschis," said Dick, "in being provided with scant ammunition for one good fight. No! There is only one thing to do. We must appear to disband our army and accept what terms Hamdi sees fit to impose with such grace as we can. If attacked by his Moslem rabble we will defend ourselves with our infantry, reserving the Akindschis for a more worthy foe."

"What?" cried Razamachi, springing to his feet, his face aflame and his eyes glittering. "You would let my Akindschis stand idle here in Istria while the infantry go out to meet this horde of Moslem dogs? That would be glorious! That would be splendid! How the women would laugh at us and call us the idle Akindschis!"

Dick turned slowly and fastened the man with his cold grey eyes.

"And so, Colonel Razamachi," said he ironically, "for the sake of pleasing the women you would send out the corps which it has taken two years to perfect, to be wasted on a riff-raff mob of scurvy der-

vishes, who would never get two miles into your hills if the road here were properly defended by the merest infantry recruits. Is that your idea of strategy?"

The hot-headed colonel seated himself.

"They will call us the idle Akindschis," he muttered. "They have already called us that for about a year."

Dick rose suddenly to his feet.

"This is child's talk," said he. "Hamdi is prepared for war. We are not, owing to the loss of the ammunition. What we must now do is to wait. We must appear to disband, but continue to recruit and drill men back in the hills. The Akindschis themselves must be disbanded."

Razamachi sprang to his feet and started to speak.

"Silence!" said Dick sternly. "Sit down!"

Razamachi obeyed, muttering.

"In the meantime," said Dick, "we will send couriers to cable to Mallock and Company of New York for double the supply of the arms and ammunition which we have lost. Fortunately our financial condition is of the best. I am personally known to Mallock and can guarantee that within four weeks after sending my cipher there will be a ship at Podoni with our supplies. On learning of her arrival we will immediately muster-in our full strength of cavalry, both Akindschis and Sepahis, make a quick march to Podoni, land the munitions

under guard and have them here in Istria before Hamdi knows that we have a soldier under arms. By that time we will also have recruited our army to the full resources of the country, which should make us an unpleasant object for interference by either of our next-door neighbours."

A dead silence followed his words; then one by one objections were offered. Hamdi's vigilance would make it impossible; Istria would be seized and held by his troops; it was probable that their persons would be apprehended. The princess would either be exiled or relegated to Hamdi's harem. Dick, listening quietly and without comment, learned a great deal which he wished to know and might not otherwise have discovered. But what struck him as of the greatest significance was the discovery that the Princess Lilear, as a determining factor in the uprising, was regarded by her chiefs as of far less consequence than her uncle had led him to believe, and that as the future sovereign, she was destined to be of much more importance to General Kostovo than to the kingdom of Karamania.

By two o'clock of the morning the council was talked out and had relapsed into a sulky silence. Nobody having anything further to offer, Dick rose to his feet. He looked about the hall with a grim smile.

"Then we are to take it as settled," said he, "that we must wait until we are better prepared, which should be within six weeks at the most.

Hamdi will not attack Istria. He is himself not strong enough at present. He would need artillery, and he knows it. For some weeks he will be quite content to let sleeping dogs lie."

A sharp rapping at the door interrupted his speech. A young officer threw it wide. On the threshold stood a man dressed as a herder of horses. A bloody bandage encircled his head; one arm hung limp and he was covered from head to foot with the sandy dust of the plains.

"One of my scouts!" cried Razamachi, springing to his feet. "Speak, Hassan!"

The man drew himself up and saluted with an effort. He was breathing rapidly, his face was of a greenish pallor, and it was evident that he had lost much blood.

"Excellencies, I am one of three scouts detailed to watch the road from Suruk. There are other scouts in the plain of Plev, and to-night one of these came to us to report that an army of dervishes is marching on Istria. They are making much noise and the Mevlevee are whirling as they go. This army, which must number no less than five thousand persons, crossed the river Plev an hour before sunset."

"*Mash Allah!*" cried Kostovo. "Hamdi tries to force our hand. He means——"

"To give up our people to fire and sword!" cried Razamachi, springing to his feet. "What do you say now, Osborne Pasha?"

"Hamdi is a good general," said Dick. "He intends that we shall use up our scant ammunition on this pack of jackals and have only empty guns to turn against his own troops." He looked toward the scout. "Of what is this army composed?"

"For the most part of dervishes, effendi; there were some few mounted men and a number riding camels. But I have still more to tell."

"Speak," said Kostovo.

"Half way from the edge of the plain to Istria my comrades and I encountered a dozen mounted men. Even in the dark we recognised them as belonging to the Montenegrin Sepahis of Hamdi Pasha. With them there was an *araba*, and all were proceeding so swiftly that we had met before there was time to scale the bank."

His voice, which had been growing fainter, died away, while the greenish hue of his face became lighter in tint.

"Let him lie down," said Dick. "Support him, one of you; he's going to fall! He's badly hurt."

A young captain sprang to the support of the scout, whose eyes were becoming vacant.

"My comrades—were cut—from the saddle——" he began, when his grip upon the rim of the door suddenly relaxed and he fell limply forward into the arms of the captain.

At the same moment a gun-shot rang out from the ramparts; it was followed by a quick, sharp cry and the sound of hurrying feet. The council sprang

up to a man and surged toward the door. From the path in the garden below there came the sound of a man running rapidly.

"Who goes there?" challenged Kostovo.

The swift steps came to a halt; a voice panting heavily answered:

"The guard, Kostovo Pasha. The sentry at the northwest tower has been murdered. In the tower itself we found the American lady, bound hand and foot, with a cloth against her mouth."

"Where is the lady now?"

"Two of my comrades are carrying her to the palace."

"Is she injured?"

"I do not think so, effendi, but she is frightened almost to the point of death."

Dick turned quickly to Kostovo.

"See if the princess is in the palace. I do not think that you will find her. She has been kidnapped by Hamdi. Colonel Razamachi!"

"Osborne Pasha?"

"How soon can you have your entire regiment of Akindschis ready to march?"

"In half an hour, excellency."

"Do so. It appears that you are to have it as you wish. Your Akindschis will strike the first blow for the freedom of Karamania, and," his voice was grim, "the chances are that it will be a hard one. Go."

Razamachi saluted and hurried down the steps,

his scabbard clanking on the stones behind him. Dick turned to Kostovo.

"General Kostovo, get your infantry under arms as quickly as possible. Send one battalion to defend the gorge which we decided upon as the strategic point on the road from Suruk. Keep the remainder with the Sepahis here, for the defence of Istria itself, as seems best to you." He turned briskly to the officers.

"Boots and saddles, gentlemen!"

CHAPTER XIV

Sunrise found the Akindschis, nearly a thousand strong, filing down through the hills toward the high plateau across which stretches the Plain of Plev. At the head of a deep ravine, where the trail from the hills comes out to meet the plain, the regiment was halted to await the return of a scouting party, sent out to reconnoitre the enemy.

In the bright fragrant morning, as Dick reviewed his force, he told himself that he had never seen a more effective looking corps. Small, lean, muscular men, with swarthy skins and keen grey eyes, they rode all with a slack rein, snug knees, and the light balanced seats of Arapahoes. Their magnificent horses were bred in the hills, selected for speed and endurance, sure-footed as *moufflon*, high-tempered, eager, but trained like hunting-dogs. A tone of the voice, a light touch on neck or withers brought its quick response from these high-strung descendants of many generations of thoroughbreds, themselves ready to fight with tooth and heel when flung against an enemy.

The troopers were armed with short, modern magazine carbines, heavy revolvers and yataghans, slightly different from the native Montenegrin wea-

pon in being rather more of a cavalry sabre and fitted with a hilt to protect the hand.

"If they lack anything," thought Dick to himself, "it is discipline."

A steady murmur arose from their ranks, with frequent bursts of stifled laughter, for the most un-Oriental feature of the Karamanian is a keen sense of humour and ready mirth. Absolute silence it seemed useless to attempt to impose, and as he thought of the day before them, Dick made no effort to do so. The active little men knew that there was some desperate fighting immediately ahead; this knowledge had been diffused in some impalpable way throughout their ranks; but as Dick reviewed them there was not an eye which did not meet his with eagerness, not a face that did not wear a smile.

"There will be standing-room only in the bosom of the Prophet to-night," he thought, and despite the gravity of the situation, his lips twisted in a grim smile. The men of the forward files saw it and laughed outright; the intelligence was wafted back that the commander-in-chief was pleased with them.

They had not long to wait before the scouts, sent on ahead from Istria, rejoined the column, and the lieutenant in command made his report.

"They number between four and five thousand," said he. "Amongst them are a few soldiers, but for the most part they are dervishes of all the different orders, with renegade brigands, Kurd hamals, mollahs, imans, mu'Azzins and other priests. There

are also many Mohammedan farmers and herders from all the country round about. From a straggler captured, we learned that Hamdi Pasha has issued an *iradé* offering them Istria and all the villages of our hills for loot and pillage."

"Is there any cavalry?" asked Dick.

"No genuine cavalry, excellency. Many of the people have taken horses from the herds along the road, but having no equipment, and the horses appearing frightened at the tumult, these are less dangerous than their comrades afoot."

"How are they armed?"

"Some have fire-arms, some spears and yataghans, while many seem to be armed only with their long knives. There is no system amongst them. They are advancing like a herd of cattle."

"It is probable," said Dick to his staff, "that Hamdi is anxious to be rid of them and has simply thrown them out, as I have said, to exhaust our ammunition and to offer us delay. We will not linger over this rabble, as there is more important work ahead. Were there less of them we would pass them by without a blow, leaving them to the infantry. But they have come so far and are so many that they must be given a sharp check."

"Would it not be better to wipe them out, leaving the path clean behind us?" asked Razamachi.

Dick swung on him sharply.

"Do you stop to kill jackals when you are wolf-hunting? How far is it from Istria to Suruk?"

"Forty kilometres, Osborne Pasha."

"And from Suruk to Karoz?"

"Forty-eight."

"Good! Four hours ago you were complaining of the idleness of your Akindschis. I have work for them to-day in both Suruk and Karoz, so we have little time and still less ammunition to waste on these pariahs ahead. We will strike them *en echelon*, cut our way through without drawing rein, reform on the other side, and continue on our way to Suruk, which we will attempt to surprise and capture. If Hamdi is there we will slay him if possible, then leaving a garrison, we will ride on to Karoz and attempt to seize that also. Does that prospect please you?"

Razamachi's beady eyes glittered.

"That is what the Akindschis are for, Osborne Pasha!"

"Then let us see how they will do it. Put your column in motion, colonel."

The sun was looking over the shoulder of the eastern hills as the Akindschis swung out into the plain. On the horizon ahead a thin cloud of dust eddied away to the southward in smoky swirls. The wind blows always, up or down the Plain of Plev, and rain falls but seldom through the summer months, and thus the position of the Moslem horde was plainly indicated.

So also should have been indicated to the "true believers" the column of Akindschis advancing rap-

idly over the plain. But the devotees of Islam, secure in their fanatical frenzy and the sense of numbers, took slight heed of the fan-shaped cloud of dust moving against the Kara Hills. It might be such a drove of horses as they had already passed, scampering across the plain; if they thought of it at all as a hostile force, it was with eager longing, for only two days before had a troop of Karamanian horsemen dashed through the market place at Suruk, scattering their pious assemblage, overturning their booths, ripping the sides from a *tekkieh* of the Mevlevee in the midst of their devotions, striking down arabaje and santon alike and generally "blackening their faces," to be gone again before they could realise that an enemy was amongst them.

Howling and whirling, screaming aloud the name of Allah, and at intervals even stopping to pray, when some Imam in authority mounted to the top of an *araba* to call the Azan, they surged out across the plain and on toward the Giaour city in the hills, offered by the *iradé* of Hamdi Pasha to the vengeance of Islam.

They were a wild and terrifying host. Hamdi Pasha himself, realising with contempt the futility of any effort at military order or discipline, and more than weary of furnishing them with food, had flung them toward his enemy as one might fling a handful of filth.

As viewed by Mohammed, it was a pious army. There were dervishes of every breed, barring only

the philosophical Vaisee. There were muribs or novices, a goodly sprinkling of santons, or holy men who had apparently risen, mushroomlike for the occasion, and whose office it was to lend their occult aid to strengthen the arms of the slayers. There were muscular, bow-backed hamals from Kurdistan, hairy and wild, the slaughterers of the Armenians, the slaughterers of anybody weaker than themselves.

Also there were renegade soldiers and brigand troops drawn by the lust of pillage and rapine, professing Islam but worshipping only carnage and loot. Some rode wild-eyed horses from the backs of which they were often thrown. Others swathed in cloths, were mounted upon camels, stalking knock-kneed and with supercilious heads amongst the throng. Many of a more practical turn of mind who had a little capital to invest in the "holy war," had brought with them *arabas* drawn by ponies or buffalo, and even pushcarts in which to carry off Giaour loot or slaves.

And so they straggled across the windy plain, in a babel of noise and dust and multi-coloured fluttering rags, until suddenly a rise of the ground brought the leaders in sight of the vanguard of the Akindschis, sitting silent and watchful on a rise of the ground but half a mile away.

A frantic uproar burst from the Moslem horde, while its actions suggested a flock of sheep suddenly confronted by the wolf-pack. The stragglers began to run in from the edges and crowd them-

selves into the mass, the whole of which grew solid and compact, apparently dwindling in size. Where at first it might have been likened to a swarm of bees in flight, it became like the same swarm clustered upon the branch.

For several minutes Dick studied the enemy attentively through his glasses. The troopers had dismounted and were tightening girths and looking to their weapons and stirrup-leathers. Presently the bugle sounded "mount" and all were in the saddle again.

Dick called Razamachi aside.

"It would not be good tactics for us to charge them when they are massed like that," said he. "We must open them out. They do not know the size of our column so perhaps we can tempt them to attack. Dismount these first two troops which they have seen, detail men to hold the horses, and send the troopers in two lines of skirmishers advancing to the attack on foot, one line on the right wing and another on the left. At a range of five hundred metres have them lie down and open fire with their carbines. Let there be an interval of at least five hundred metres between these two skirmish parties. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, Osborne Pasha."

"Good. These fanatics will be sure to make a rush, which will not only scatter them but split their centre. Then, when I give the word, have the bugler sound the charge and our mounted troops will sweep

through the dervishes in a flying wedge, destroying as many as they can but not drawing rein; do you understand? Not drawing rein. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, Osborne Pasha."

"Good. The dismounted troops will not have reached their horses until after we have charged. They are to mount and ride in a détour on either side of the dervishes without engaging." Dick's voice rang out harshly. "Make that clear to the captains—that they are not under any circumstances to engage."

Razamachi's face became a mass of wrinkles.

"But why?" he began.

Dick swung on him savagely.

"Because those are the orders, Colonel Razamachi Bey; that is why! Now carry them out as quickly as you can."

Razamachi scowled, but saluted and wheeled his horse sharply. Calling the two captains aside, he transmitted the orders, which, as Dick could see with the tail of his eye, were received first with a few sharp words of protest and then in moody silence. But no time was lost.

A moment later the two troops which had been upon the crest of the rise and were alone visible to the dervishes, turned in opposite directions and trotted sharply out upon the plain until some distance beyond the right and left wings of the dervish array, when they halted. The troopers dismounted quickly, took their intervals and in line of skirmish-

ers advanced at a double quick toward the enemy. Dick, watching them closely, felt his soul cheered at the smartness of the manœuvre.

The dervishes were still huddled in dense confusion. It was apparent that they expected an infantry charge; their frenzied cries grew wilder. The frantic yells of "*Allah akbar! Allah akbar!*" rose in a swelling diapason. Those in the front ranks leaped up and down bawling defiance and howling imprecations. The Giaours of the hills, instead of being stricken, were now moving forward to strike!

Good! It would make their conquest easier than if they were to be hunted from their lairs. Even before the skirmishers had ceased to advance the impatient fanatics began to break away from the edges of their formation and fling forward to meet them.

For a moment Dick was afraid that their frenzy was going to spoil the military precision of his manœuvre, and that to save the two dismounted troops he would be obliged to give the signal to charge before a shot had been fired.

Then suddenly the little brown troopers on the plain sank to the earth as one man, even while the foremost of the fanatics were leaping toward them, and the whole mass showed signs of division and disintegration. A clear, loud call went ringing down the wind; instantly the skirmish lines began to spout fine white jets of smoke, and a moment later the

crackling reports reached the ears of their companions.

Some of the leaping figures were seen to pitch forward upon their faces; others sank to the ground screaming, while still others fell back upon their fellows in the rear. But as a whole, the horde still surged forward, its centre growing thinner and thinner until suddenly, like some cohesive mass which is stretched beyond its limits it parted entirely, while the two bodies, now distinct, lost in an instant their density as they opened up to swallow the infidel.

The moment was ripe. Dick turned to his bugler.

"Sound the charge!"

CHAPTER XV

The wild note rang out, its swelling cadence lost in the roar of hoofs as the Akindschis leaped forward to the charge. They were none too soon. Dervishes were falling within twenty paces of the skirmish line before their comrades had swept past them and poured like a devastating flood into the open ranks of their assailants.

The Akindschis, at Razamachi's order, had drawn revolvers, and these they used to the exclusion of their yataghans while in the thick of the fight. For a moment the charge, though well planned and well executed, became a whirling maelstrom of furious hand-to-hand fighting, the powder from the Akindschis' weapons flaming the very beards of their crazed antagonists.

Dervishes upon their feet looked into the muzzles of the pistols and struck without flinching, though their souls went to Allah with the blow. Dervishes, bowled over, lay upon their backs to strike with their yataghans at the flying legs of the horses which trod them. Dick saw a weaponless mollah, a gaping wound in his chest, fling his arms about a trooper, drag him from the saddle and die with his teeth in the man's shoulder. Others wounded,

wrapped their sinewy arms around the horses' knees even while trodden under foot. A camel was hit and maddened with pain and fury, charged to right and left, striking and kicking and snarling furiously.

Dick himself had fought fiercely but automatically, emptying both revolvers, with scarcely a consciousness of how or at whom, in his passionate eagerness to see that his regiment pressed on through, keeping its formation intact and never checking its headlong advance.

And this the Akindschis did, and splendidly. Furious as the fighting seemed and long, the time that it takes a man to run a thousand yards found them out again in the open plain, their formation still intact, sweeping on away from their enemy.

Well clear of the fight, they halted. Here and there a saddle was empty, or a man was ministering to his own or his comrades' wounds. Forming quickly in separate troops, they re-loaded and looked back at the havoc left in their wake.

The fanatic army was torn into ribbons. The charge of the Akindschis had flung back the swarm which had been rushing forward to destroy the skirmishers, who had reached their horses, mounted, and were then riding forward to rejoin their column.

As the charge had swept through and past the rabble, bands of dervishes had broken away from the main body and pursued the troopers, howling like dogs. Some of these the Karamanians had turned upon and killed; others had followed them

all of the way to where they had halted. Several were shot down like rabid animals, directly at the troopers' feet.

But although the Moslems had suffered frightful loss and had inflicted but little in return, the mutilation received appeared only to have whetted their appetite for battle; and as the two companies deployed as skirmishers rode forward together, they sprang to receive them.

On they came at a gallop while Dick watched them in perplexity. Their orders had been not to join forces but to ride around on either side of the dervishes and rejoin the column without engaging. Instead of this, they had come together and appeared to be heading straight for the divided centre of the enemy.

"Do they mean to disobey orders?" cried Dick angrily to Razamachi.

The colonel shrugged.

"They are Karamanians!" said he oracularly.

"Sound the assembly!"

The bugle sang out melodiously; as it did so the troopers far on the opposite side of the field were seen to learn forward, drawing their revolvers. At the same time the mass closed in upon them from either side. The bright sun sparkled on thousands of flashing points, and the gusty wind brought down the clamour of shots and savage cries. The two troops had deliberately, and in direct obedience of orders, engaged the enemy.

Dick watched them in stony silence. Far in the distance the brown Kara hills rose gaunt and rugged, but bathed in splendid shadows of saffron and purple, their harsh outlines against a sky of silvery blue. From their slopes the plains rolled forward in long undulations like great ocean swells, but the foreground was claimed by the tossing, glittering, multi-coloured army of blood-thirsty religionists of a dying faith locked in the death grapple with a mortal enemy.

Dick, watching with fury, cursed in his heart the wild lawless spirit of the hills which made of his otherwise magnificent command upon which everything now depended, a mutinous, undisciplined mob.

Yet he knew that if he could hold their comrades all might yet be well. Not one man of the whole regiment should stir by his order no matter if the two furiously fighting troops were massacred before their very eyes. And that was what appeared to be destined.

The two refractory troops had apparently determined to pass through the divided Moslems by the same path as their companions, and at the first glance this appeared to be easy of accomplishment with little or no loss to themselves, for the regiment had flung back the two separated masses as a snow-plough clears a road, leaving drifted carnage in its trail.

But the frenzied fanatics had poured in behind; the gap was rapidly filling and half way through

the two troopers found themselves hemmed in by hundreds.

Even then they might easily have cut their way out upon the other side had they kept this manœuvre in mind, but wild, tempestuous hill-folk that they were and maddened by the fury of the Moslems, they made no effort at anything beyond the destruction of the enemy.

Twice they had fought their way to the very edge of the mass and then had turned and fought their way back into it again. Their revolvers were long since emptied and they were fighting with their yataghans, hacking, hewing, stabbing with incredible fury. Before long the results of the fight became easily evident. The dervishes were thinning fast, but at the same time the ebullitions, stirring here and there throughout the whole rotating mass, were becoming smaller and less. On the outskirts were clusters of dead and wounded men; maimed and stricken creatures were crawling sometimes on hands and knees from out of the vortex, to fall in the open ground beyond.

But Dick was watching the fight with far less anxiety than that with which he scanned his regiment. Behind him the other troops were straining forward like hounds in the leash, clamouring openly to be led to the rescue of their comrades. Every other minute one of the captains would dash up to Razamachi to protest passionately at being obliged to sit and watch the massacre of two entire troops.

To these officers, the colonel gave short, sullen answers, at the same time turning his beady eyes malevolently toward Dick.

When at length the murmurs from the regiment had grown into an uproar, Razamachi himself could stand it no longer.

"Are we to stand here like stone images, Osborne Pasha?" he cried, "while our comrades,"—he pointed with his sabre toward the fight—"are ripped in pieces by this pack of pariah dogs?"

Dick turned upon him furiously.

"Are you cowards?" he cried harshly, that all near him might hear. "Are you afraid of the work ahead? Do you want to go on, or do you want to finish the day with these jackals and then ride back to Istria with nothing done? Are not two troops of Akindschis enough to destroy these vermin? Must it take the whole regiment?"

"We wish to save our brothers!" cried a voice from the ranks.

"Silence!" roared Dick. A look of fierce contempt showed itself on his rigid face. "Perhaps you had rather fight half-naked priests now than Hamdi's Sepahis an hour later!"

The taunt had its full effect, although it brought an angry snarl from the ranks. Dick wheeled his horse and riding slowly down the column, lashed each successive troop with the same bitter, sneering words; words which at any other time could not have been uttered to a single man.

Utterly disregarding the fight, he threw his whole force and energy into holding the regiment in check, and in this he won the day. For suddenly a shout burst from the tensely watching troopers, then a roar, and looking toward the plain, Dick saw the last ragged fragment of the Moslem army fly suddenly to pieces. Right from its hollow core it broke, like a jug dropped on a pavement, and a moment later the fanatics were in flight, here, there, scattering in every direction over the plain.

After them, like terriers after rats, went the few half-mad survivors of the Akindschis, slashing and stabbing, cutting down all within the reach of their keen-edged yataghans. At length, spent and exhausted, they came limping back to the column.

Of those who had ridden into the fight, some hundred and ten in all, there were left perhaps a score, not a man of whom was whole.

A captain, the only surviving officer, rode straight to Dick and saluted with his dripping blade.

"You gave us great support, Osborne Pasha!" he cried, with savage irony.

"I will give you a court-martial before you are many days older," answered Dick harshly. "You mutinous dog, was it because you thought we would haul you out by the nape of the neck that you disobeyed your orders!"

The captain stared. His mouth quivered.

"To obey your orders would have disgraced us!" he cried.

"You fool!" exclaimed Dick fiercely. "Do you call yourself a soldier? You have thrown away the finest men on a worthless enemy. You are finished before we start. Now, your orders are to remain here and look after the wounded, while those of us who understand discipline will go ahead with the real work of this war."

The officer stared at him, dazed and stunned. He dropped his blood-stained face into his hands and burst into tears. Dick turned his back upon him and addressed Razamachi.

"The regiment has lost two hundred men!" he snapped. "It should not have needed fifty. Instruct the men, whose horses have been killed or are not fit to go on, to remain here as a guard for the wounded and to convey them back to Istria as best they can. This will reduce our force to about seven hundred men, but there is no help for it. We have no time to lose."

Razamachi saluted in silence and gave the necessary orders. Out across the Plain of Plev tattered fragments of the dervish army were slinking off in all directions, with many a furtive backward glance. To the southward a heavy cloud of dust was streaking off in wind-blown ribbons; and as Dick watched it idly, wondering as to its cause, a second and smaller cloud arose above the slightly higher ground a point to the eastward of the first.

His suspicion was aroused. Fixing the dust-clouds with his glass he discovered them to be mov-

ing slowly toward the east, then as he continued to watch them, he suddenly observed two small, black objects, which a moment later proved to be horsemen coming rapidly in his direction. When near at hand he saw that they were the Akindschis' scouts, sent out to reconnoitre Suruk.

As they drew rein one of the horses staggered and fell; its mate stood tottering, legs apart, sides bulging, and eyes glazed. The splendid animals had travelled from Istria to Suruk, thence a third of the way on the road to Karoz, and back to the scene of the battle since the departure of the column from Istria.

"What have you learned?" asked Dick sharply. "Speak!"

"Suruk has been evacuated, excellency. Hamdi Pasha is concentrating at Karoz. The Montenegrin Sepahis, to the number of five hundred, rode out from the town an hour ago. That is their dust." He pointed to the southeast.

"And the other dust?"

"That is from the Turkish garrison infantry column, now in Hamdi's pay. They also number in the neighbourhood of five hundred men."

"Have you learned anything of the Princess Lilear?"

"It appears that she was not taken to Suruk at all, excellency, but directly to Karoz, by Hamdi Pasha himself. Half of his personal escort accompanied him, while the other half returned to

Suruk with an empty *araba* and orders for the garrison to evacuate and march at once to Karoz."

"From whom did you learn this?"

"From a eunuch at Hamdi's palace. Suruk is like a city of the dead. All have gone but a few servants who are looting the palace."

"You have done well." Dick turned to his orderly. "My compliments to Colonel Razamachi and I wish to speak with him."

A moment later Razamachi rode up. Dick pointed to the two dust-clouds advancing slowly across the horizon.

"There are five hundred Sepahis and five hundred Turkish infantry," said he. "They are proceeding to Karoz. If they get there Karamania is lost to us. Is the column ready to move?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE Akindschis were travelling fast. The Karamanian horses possess a smooth, gliding single-foot gait which devours the miles swiftly with little wear on horse or rider.

Far across the Plain of Plev the movement of the dust-clouds showed that the Sepahis had overhauled and passed the infantry. A little later the dust of the Sepahis disappeared as they left the plain and entered the hills. Razamachi calculated that the column would overtake the infantry in a broad valley, where the trail from Suruk to Karoz wound between gentle slopes before entering a deep gorge cut by the river Plev.

In this he proved to be correct. An hour later, as they entered the valley, the infantry column was discovered half a mile ahead. The Akindschis had been sighted, and the Turks were formed in a hollow square to receive them. Beyond, the walls of the valley came together to form a narrow ravine where a bend hid the Sepahis from sight.

The Akindschis halted and Dick passed them in rapid review. As he observed their splendid condition, his spirits rose. Here and there a horse or rider was marked by some minor wound, but the regiment as a whole was in excellent form. It had

travelled thirty miles since dawn and fought a sharp little fight but, if one ignored the scars of battle, horses and riders might have been fresh from the stables.

As Dick rode down the line, the swarthy, bright-eyed little troopers shot looks of keenest expectancy at the commander-in-chief, against whom but an hour ago they had all but risen in open mutiny; but whose methods they had been sharply taught to respect. The lesson of Squadron A, cut to pieces by the dervishes and its survivors left to nurse their wounded, had done everything for the discipline of Razamachi's Akindschis.

On ascertaining the position of the enemy, Dick immediately formed his plan of attack. The whole force, which numbered about seven hundred men, was to be split into two squadrons. The first, under Razamachi, was to be dismounted and attack the infantry on foot. The second, under Dick himself, was to overtake the Sepahis and hang on their heels, keeping them under carbine fire but not attempting to actually engage until Razamachi should come up.

"But why waste our time with this infantry?" grumbled the impetuous colonel. "It is nothing but the old Turkish garrison, gone over to Hamdi. They do not want to fight, and will surrender at the first volley."

"That is why I am leaving you a full squadron," said Dick. "If you were fewer they would probably

fight, and if I spared you any more, the Sepahis ahead would turn and devour us. As it is, I shall try to hold them in check without closing with them until you come up. But if this is impossible and the worst comes to the worst, my three hundred and fifty Akindschis will have to do their best. Our men are better mounted and use their fire-arms, whereas the Montenegrins prefer to fight with the yataghan. Furthermore, the Karamanians are fighting for their homes and families while the Montenegrins are fighting for so many piastres a day."

Five minutes' halt to tighten girths and examine weapons and the second squadron was again in motion. It held straight on down the valley, passing the infantry without the exchange of a single shot, and before the astonished Turks could realise its purpose had passed out of range and was rapidly disappearing in the distance. Almost at the same instant Razamachi's squadron appeared, dismounted, and moved to the attack in line of skirmishers.

As Dick's squadron swept around the bend at the far end of the valley they came in sight of the Montenegrin Sepahis less than a mile ahead proceeding slowly down the gorge. Almost immediately they were discovered, when the Sepahis executed a manœuvre which strung them across the narrow valley from side to side and facing their enemy. It was apparent that they were suspicious of an effort on the part of the better-mounted Akindschis to

make a dash through or past them and reach Karoz in advance.

Within good carbine range of the enemy Dick brought his squadron to a halt, and for the moment the two hostile forces sat in silence eyeing each other vigilantly. Dick's interests lay all in delaying the assault for as long as the Sepahis could be held in check. For their part, the Montenegrins themselves had twice felt the fierce, lashing onslaught of the small, dark, active troopers sitting their well-trained horses with light, clinging seats and carbines on their thighs; they had not had time to estimate their relative numbers, and so for the moment the Sepahis were in no haste to precipitate a battle.

Then, as they waited in watchful tension, there came suddenly from up the gorge the reverberating echoes of a volley, followed almost immediately by the rattling reports of firing on the skirmish line.

The Sepahis hesitated to attack. Dick was thankful of the respite, for his squadron had travelled fast and it gave an opportunity to breathe his horses.

He scanned the ground critically, and a furrow drew itself between his eyes as he noted how unfavourable it was for the Akindschis. The ravine was less than two hundred yards in width before mounting in steep, boulder-strewn slopes. Between these the floor of the gorge was fairly smooth, composed of sand and loose stones but with here and there a huge boulder, which would have made any general

evolution quite impossible, even had space permitted of it.

It was very obvious that if the clash came here the two hostile forces would block the entire place and the fighting would be hand to hand, thigh to thigh, and jaw to jaw. This would give an advantage to the Sepahis, who were larger and heavier men than the Karamanians, and liked best to fight in exactly this way.

Had Dick commanded trained and disciplined cavalry he would have fired a volley, then wheeled and retreated up the valley to the open ground; as it was, he distrusted the ability of his Akindschis to conduct an orderly retreat. Such a manœuvre requires, perhaps, more than any other, veteran troops and a cold-blooded discipline which was not to be expected amongst the hot-blooded little hillmen.

But even as he deliberated he saw that the Sepahis were getting restive. The Montenegrins are fighting-men; their hands were on the hilts of their yataghans, an enemy, obviously inferior in numbers, was in front of them, and their suspicions were aroused at this hesitation on the part of foemen who had heretofore been ready enough to strike.

In that moment Dick realised that the pivotal point of the Karamanian struggle for liberty had been reached. Hamdi Pasha's holy war had failed; its miserable dupes were scattered dead, dying and fugitive across the Plain of Plev. The defeat of the Turkish Infantry by Razamachi's squadron was

a thing assured. Could he now but fall upon and destroy the mercenaries in front of him Karoz would be at his mercy.

And the Princess Lilear, his princess, to the service of whom he was sworn, was at that moment a prisoner in Karoz, in the power of the Turk. There came to him the swift vision of a pale, passionate face with long, clear eyes half-veiled by the double row of black lashes, a quivering upper lip and suddenly his heart sent the blood tingling through his limbs, and his grip on the reins tightened.

Opposite him the Sepahis were stirring uneasily, and Dick saw at a glance that he was not going to be able to carry out his manœuvre as he had planned. The enemy was forming for a massed attack.

"It will not do to let them charge," he said quickly to his major. "We will have to charge ourselves, but first give them a volley."

The Sepahis were drawing in their wings. The irregularity of the ground made any sustained formation impossible, but it was obvious that when the clash came the advantage would be with the body which was moving ahead cohesively and with greater force. Dick had hoped for time at least to throw the enemy into momentary confusion by a volley, then to charge before it had recovered. But even as he looked, he saw that the opportunity was overripe; that if he were to strike at all he must strike on the instant.

"Draw revolvers!" he said sharply to his major.

The officer swung in his saddle and shouted the order. The squadron was hanging tense and poised, the troopers eager and expectant, straining forward like cheetahs on the leash. A firece sibilant mutter ran through the ranks, a shrill-noted growl, as the lean, brown hands snatched the revolvers from their holsters.

At the same instant Dick's eye was caught by a sudden movement in the ranks of the enemy. He rose high in his stirrups and waved his revolver over his head.

"Akindschis, charge!" he bellowed.

CHAPTER XVII

Before the words were out of his mouth the walls of the ravine were thundering back the echoes of the horses' hoofs and the savage cries of the Karamanian riders.

But the Sepahis had not waited for the attack. As the Akindschis swept forward, they sprang to meet them, and the two compact and swiftly moving bodies came together with terrific violence.

At the first crushing contact many horses and riders were overthrown; a moment later and the jam was so close that a horse could not have fallen except by dropping straight in its tracks and a trooper could move only as the surging of the press carried him.

Dick, charging at the head of his column, found himself wedged into a crevice in the ranks of the enemy. Neither side had fired a shot during the charge; the Sepahis had flung aside their carbines and drawn their yataghans, but the Akindschis struck their enemy, revolvers in hand; and jammed together as they were, their fire had, for the first few minutes, been terribly effective.

Dick himself had quickly cleared a place about him when for several moments their very pressure kept him beyond the sweep of the weapons of the enemy which hemmed him in. Firing quickly and

carefully he wasted but few shots; around about him the firing was growing less and less as the Akindschis, having emptied their revolvers, thrust them back in their holsters and drew their sabres.

The men of the forward ranks were fighting furiously, knee to knee, but there were many in the rear of both forces who had not fired a shot or struck a blow; some of these, gripped tight in the jam, were unable to move and sat their ponies, howling like dogs; some, almost at the front, hauled themselves from the saddle and swarmed across the backs of their comrades' horses to get within striking distance of the enemy, while others, on the outer edges, broke off and climbed like cats around the steep, boulder-covered sides of the gorge to strike their enemy upon the flank. A few of the cooler-headed Akindschis had slipped from their horses, carbine in hand, and sprawling over the rocks on either side, were inflicting heavy damage on the enemy.

Suddenly Dick found himself, sabre in hand, packed in the midst of his own men. The Akindschis had gained ground on one side, falling back on the other, and this had given a rotary motion to the whole mass, which suddenly reversed the order of the combatants, bringing those in the rear, forward. On every side of him were riderless horses and raving troopers, who had survived the first shock of contact.

For an instant it looked as if the Sepahis had been wiped away; then a sweeping eddy of the fight

brought straight into the massed Akindschis a solid column of hacking, hewing Montenegrins, cutting their way through like reapers in a field of grain, and every man was locked with an enemy again.

After a swift crisis of slaughter, which no mind, however cool, could follow, it seemed to Dick that the press had suddenly lightened, although the enemy had grown no less; with this came vivid pictures which flashed out clear and sharp and tangible, like the sight of objects caught in a lightning-flash, each instantly swept away by the next.

A savage, bearded face, filthy with sweat and dust, grinned almost in his own, a sabre flashed above his head; he parried, struck in turn, was parried—the point leaped out at him like a snake, the blade glanced from his and its edge bit into his horse's neck. The animal wheeled with a screaming snort, struck the horse of an enemy upon the other side and Dick swung high and slashed down with all of his strength at this one whom chance had brought within his reach—and felt the keen blade bite through bone and muscle, then cursed savagely as the head of his victim struck his knee a painful blow when the man fell.

Quickly another tableau followed; a path appeared ahead, an avenue, as if the ranks had opened for review and with one of his Akindschis on either side, he plunged forward, reaching the far end, where a man's vacant face stared at him between his pony's ears. The mouth was open, the features

tense; clotted blood pulsed in a gaping wound beneath the jaw. Through the envelope of sweat and dust and blood, Dick recognised the man for an Akindschi captain, and in the wide, unseeing eyes, he read the death agony. As he pressed on past, the vacant face contracted, the body heaved, the yataghan flew up above Dick's head for a last blind, automatic blow; before it fell a Sepahi with whom he rubbed thighs, thrust his sword viciously through the all but lifeless body, and as he struggled to withdraw it Dick lunged across the Akindschi's horse and his sabre passed through the heart of his Montenegrin preserver.

Then Dick found himself, blinded with sweat and blood, wedged amongst his own men and many riderless horses, with no enemy in reach of his blade. All about the Akindschis were clamouring one to the other to make room. Not twenty feet away was a furious vortex of fighting; troopers on either side were slipping to the ground to reach an enemy, then leaping to the saddle again. A number were fighting on foot. Many a Sepahi horse was carrying an Akindschi rider.

Dick's reason, blinded for the moment by the stress of battle, returned to him in the brief respite; he realised that not a shot was being fired. It was steel, nothing but steel, and so the combat marched but slowly. He snatched his revolver from the holster, flung out the shells and began to cram fresh cartridges into the greasy chambers.

"Load revolvers! Load! Load revolvers!" he bawled to the screaming men around him.

No heed was paid and he gripped the shoulder of a trooper jammed against his side. The man spun in his saddle, the sabre quivering in his hand.

"Load! Load!" shouted Dick. "Use your revolvers!"

The trooper stared; quick intelligence swept away the frenzy. He shouted to his mates. The word passed swiftly. A moment later the revolvers of the stalled Akindschis began to bark again, and almost as they did so, another upheaval of the fight flung the enemy into the midst.

A following phase of this battle-life, which seemed to him interminably long, found Dick the object of attack by several enemies. With his weapons freshly charged, he quickly fought his way through them, when fresh ones surged up as if rising from the earth. Something had come to obscure his vision and twice this had narrowly cost him his life. The revolvers were empty again and with no time to reload he drew his sabre.

A moment later his horse was down, struck by an Akindschi bullet, directly afterwards he found himself clinging to the stirrup of a Sepahi's horse, struggling to mount, while the rider, whom he had just sabred, was writhing on the ground and stabbing at his legs.

As he rode back into the fight, wiping his eyes with his sleeve, he saw that the press was lighter

and the struggle less furious. Men's blows were struck more slowly and with whistling breaths. Here and there horses were standing with legs apart, propped as it were to keep from falling, heads down, ribs working like bellows. The sand was carpeted with men and animals. The cries and shouts had ceased, even while the crash of blows continued.

Then suddenly the carbines began to crack again; the reek of powder filled the air as the wounded Akindschis began to shoot. Jets of smoke spouted from forms prostrate upon the sand.

Dick looked about bewildered, and to his amazement found that he was entirely alone, in the very middle of the valley, his pony with head hanging low, picking its way between the bodies of the slain. Presently the beast came to a stop and Dick began to reload his revolver, finding the chambers with difficulty.

As he was doing this he saw that the battle had broken into individual fights, involving a score or two score of men, and these were going on here and there, quite apart and in different locations.

He was about to fling himself into the nearest when a Sepahi bore down upon him with his yataghan swinging above his head and his horse labouring heavily through the deep sand. Straight at him he came, without drawing rein, and as Dick swerved and fired, the other struck.

The blow fell wide, striking Dick's pony across the neck, shearing through the spine and deep into

the muscles. The animal dropped straight in its tracks, and rolled, half-burying Dick in the sand. Instinctively he struggled clear, but a sudden faintness overcame him and for several minutes he lay utterly inert.

When he looked about again, dazed and spent, the knots of fighting men appeared to have dissolved. Here and there were clusters of exhausted troopers, some sitting, others prone and indistinguishable from the slain. A short distance from him a Sepahi was standing on his feet, clinging to the mane of a wounded pony, while two Akindschis sprawling on the ground near by regarded him listlessly. Presently one of them raised his carbine with an effort, fired, and the Sepahi fell without a struggle.

A pony, his reins dragging, walked slowly past and close to Dick lay down on the sand, tucking in its legs like a sheep. At a little distance, three Akindschis were sitting upon a flat stone, their hands clasped in front of their knees, rocking themselves back and forth and singing one of their folk-songs with maudlin voices. Behind Dick a wounded man was groaning while not twenty feet from where he lay arose the furious voices of four Akindschis who were quarrelling violently. As Dick looked in their direction one of them raised his yataghan to strike, when a mate at his elbow seized his arm and they fell to the ground, struggling and cursing.

Wounded men on every side were crying for water, but none was to be had in that dry place of sand and stones. A squad of troopers laughing uproariously and swaying in their saddles, came riding up from the lower end of the gorge, and Dick gathered from the jokes which were passing between them that they were returning from the pursuit and slaughter of fugitive Sepahis.

One of the men spied him and rode to where he was sitting on the sand, his back against the rump of his dead horse.

"That was a good fight, excellency!" cried the man.

"Yes," said Dick wearily, "it was a good fight."

"It will be a lesson to these black-faces! *Karamania chock yasha! Karamania chock yasha!*" (Long live Karamania).

The man dismounted.

"Is your excellency badly wounded?" he asked.

"No," said Dick slowly. "I am resting."

The trooper laughed again.

"One has need to rest. But there is not a spot on your excellency the size of a *medjideah* that is not bloody."

Dick raised his eyes to the man with a slow smile.

"You are not much better," he answered. "That was a hard fight."

"A bath would do me no harm, and a drink of water less. Your excellency would not guess it, but I am one of your captains. We were side by side

for several minutes and twice I saved your excellency's life, and twice you did the same for me."

"You Akindschis," said Dick, "are good fighters. Your courage is better than your discipline. Give me a hand to my feet. I have lost some blood."

The captain helped him up, and in a moment his head grew clear again.

"Get me a good horse," he said.

"My own is sound, Osborne Pasha; you will find no better."

"Good!"

Dick mounted laboriously, and sat for a minute reviewing the field. Fearful as the carnage had been, he regarded it with no emotion, his faculties being, for the moment, numbed. Here and there some survivor was ministering to a wounded comrade, but for the most a stillness of sound and motion lay on the place.

But the Akindschis! "The idle Akindschis!" Looking about the field, Dick slowly realised that of his entire squadron not fifty men remained, and of these it was doubtful if a single man was unhurt.

His own head and limbs and body were covered with countless minor wounds, none of which was disabling. He was roughly dressing these when a bugle sang out from the head of the valley and here came the second squadron in column of fours, the troopers crying out with horror and amazement as the carnage met their eyes.

At their head rode Razamachi, one arm in a sling

and a bloody bandage above his knee. Halting the column, he hastened to join Dick.

"*Mash Allah!* But you have been busy, Osborne Pasha. And your squadron?"

Dick jerked his head toward the battlefield.

"It is there."

"But the survivors? They are in pursuit of the enemy?"

"No; the enemy are here also. There are some fifty and odd Akindschis resting in the shade of those rocks. And what have you to report?"

Razamachi's staring eyes were travelling slowly across the field; he was making in his throat the peculiar clicking sound, expressive of amazement. At Dick's final words he recovered his self-possession.

"The infantry have surrendered and are under guard, Osborne Pasha."

"Good! And your losses?"

"Forty killed and wounded," he answered.

"You have done very well, Colonel Razamachi. We will leave the survivors of my squadron to rest and assist their comrades. Have the prisoners carry the wounded to the nearest village. Select all of the sound men from your squadron and we will proceed at once to the next village upon the route to Karoz, where we will halt for an hour for food and rest."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards we will ride on to Karoz, which we will attempt to surprise and carry by assault."

Razamachi looked doubtful.

"That is asking a great deal of our men and horses, Osborne Pasha."

"*Sapristi!*" snarled Dick. "Will nothing satisfy you, man? Only last night you were growling like a cross camel because you feared the women might call your regiment the 'idle Akindschis'!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A SCANT three hundred strong, who that morning had mustered a thousand, the Akindschis rode slowly down the ravine, filed through the pass, and came out beyond upon the sweeping Plain of Karoz, which is divided by a spur of the Kara Hills from the Plain of Plev.

Here in a village they came upon some half-dozen fugitive Sepahis, and these, according to the primitive and thorough rules of Oriental warfare, they promptly shot down in their tracks. Learning from the villagers, true Karamanians, that a few other stragglers of the Sepahis regiment had passed through on the road to Karoz, twenty fresh horses were procured, and mounting picked men upon these, they were put under command of a captain with instructions to ride rapidly to the very walls of Karoz, overtaking the fugitives ahead, whom they were to kill or capture. The rest of the squadron halted for an hour for food and repose.

The sun was sinking behind the Kara Hills when they rode out again and turned their horses' heads towards Karoz, fifteen miles away. Before they had travelled far they came upon two dead Sepahis lying by the roadside. Farther on there was a third,

and still farther they passed three more. It was apparent that the scouts were executing their mission successfully.

Before long the darkness came, and soon afterwards they mounted some rising ground and saw the lights of Karoz glittering brightly not more than five miles distant. Half an hour's brisk riding brought them within sight of the grim walls of the old Frankish castle looming darkly against the starlit sky. Almost to the town they came upon the scouts, returning to report.

"Karoz lies open to your hand, excellency," said the captain in command. "It was expected that we might come by the direct road from Istria and the Turkish garrison which was here, about three hundred men, have been sent to hold the pass between the hills just before the road comes out upon the plain. There is left scarcely a corporal's guard in the fortress; and Hamdi Pasha himself is giving a banquet in his palace, the lights of which you see on the hill to your right. A rumour has come, I do not know how, but apparently brought by some flatterer anxious to please, that we Akindschis were cut to pieces in destroying the dervish army on the Plain of Plev." He laughed and his comrades joined him.

"How did you learn all of this?" asked Dick.

The young man hesitated slightly, then answered with apparent embarrassment:

"From a woman of my acquaintance, excellency,

whose brother is a merchant of horses and knows all of the gossip of the bazaars."

"Good," said Dick. "Then you think that we can seize the fortress without difficulty?"

"Without the striking of a blow. I have taken two Sepahis prisoners. When we are challenged one of these will answer 'Hamdi Pasha's Sepahis,' and we will ride in unquestioned, for the Montenegrins are expected even now."

Dick tugged at his moustache. Presently he turned to Razamachi.

"The plan is a good one," said he. "Do you, Colonel Razamachi, proceed to carry it out, seizing the fortress and immediately organising a castle guard and a detail to patrol the town. The infantry sent to block the road from Istria will of course surrender as soon as they learn the state of affairs."

"And you, Osborne Pasha?"

"You may give me twenty-five men under a lieutenant. Although not invited, I believe that I will assist at the banquet given to-night by Hamdi Pasha!"

CHAPTER XIX

SECURE in the knowledge brought by his scouts that Razamachi's Akindschis had ridden out from Istria at daylight, apparently to give battle to the army of dervishes, and further fortified in the tidings brought by a *mollah* that although they had cut this army into ribbons, the Akindschis themselves had been decimated in so doing, Hamdi Pasha felt that he had succeeded almost beyond his expectations if not in excess of his just deserts.

"It is hardly fair," thought the Ottoman, with a lurking smile. "These simple hill-folk—such children! But really, I had expected better things of Osborne Pasha."

He reviewed rapidly in his mind the success attending his every move. The burning of the custom-house with Kostovo's supplies, the fomentation of the *djehad*, his abduction of the princess, the ruse by which he had led the Karamanians to believe that she had been taken to Suruk, and his timely launching of the dervish army to check the pursuit —all was most gratifying. The only feature to mar the whole was the unfortunate accident to his friends at the hands of his Montenegrins; but this, he told himself, with perfect truth, was the result of circumstances which no living man could possibly have foreseen.

As matters stood, he did not see how his position could be stronger. Suruk, to be sure, had been evacuated, but Suruk was a place of little value and no strategic importance. Even now, his Sepahis must be entering Karoz, the infantry on their heels, while the road from Istria was effectually closed for the time, at least. As to the ultimate fate of Istria itself, that would have to be determined by subsequent events.

And so, in the flush of his triumph, he had illuminated his palace, and caused a banquet to be spread, and summoned guests from Karoz; and good Mohammedan, which he was not, had caused the vintage wines to flow like water.

Divers nations were represented at his board. There were two German officers, an English racing man, come horse buying to Karoz, and another to shoot *moufflon*, a lieutenant from a French man-of-war lying at Saloniki, a low-browed Servian prince, and two Russian agents of the Douma, there to observe the separation of Karamania as dogs watch the strokes of the butcher's knife.

The wine had flowed freely; the semi-diplomatic dignity with which the banquet had begun was all but washed away in repeated libations of its amber-coloured, effervescent antidote; and when Hamdi had risen to his feet and, in a few graceful and serious words, described the progress of his campaign against what he was pleased to characterise as "the turbulent, half-savage people of the hills,"



followed by a brief outline of his future liberal policy, the enthusiasm of his guests became an uproar.

When the applause had in part subsided, a man with a flushed face rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet.

"Gentlemen," said he, in French, for that was the language current. "A toast! Long live King Hamdi the First, of Karamania!"

With a shout, the banqueters sprang to their feet, every glass raised high. But the health was destined never to be drunk; even as the pledge hung upon their lips, there came from without a sudden uproar and fierce voices, raised in savage admonition. Many footsteps clattered on the marble terrace; then the doors of the banqueting-hall were flung wide, and a sinister figure, swathed in bandages which were blood-stained and covered with dust, stood upon the threshold and surveyed the revellers with keen, observant eyes. Behind him, the antechamber was filled with armed men, trooping forward, weapons in hand.

Slowly the raised glasses were lowered, their contents spilled disregarded on the damask cloth. In wonder and awe the banqueters stared at this uncouth disturber of the feast. The powdery dust of the plains formed grimy shadows in the harsh lines of his pallid face; his clothes were cut and torn, powder-blackened and blood-stained through the layer of enveloping dust. One bandaged arm hung

in a rude sling made from a stirrup leather; the other closed on the butt of a heavy revolver.

Hamdi Pasha himself was the first to recover. He sprang to his feet and faced the intruders.

"Who are you?" he snarled, in French.

"I am Osborne Pasha. Where is the princess?"

"Dog of a mercenary!" Hamdi raised himself furiously in his chair.

"Where is the princess, Turcoman? Answer!"

"How should I know?"

Dick took a quick step forward and thrust the muzzle of his revolver almost against the face of the Turk.

"Where is the princess, you swine? I shall not ask again!"

Hamdi Pasha sank back. He was no coward but he saw his life hanging by a slender thread.

"She is under guard at the castle," he muttered, sulkily.

Dick eyed him with suspicion.

"At the castle, eh?" He glanced back over his shoulder. "Lieutenant——!"

A fierce-faced, battle-stained officer stepped forward and saluted.

"Place Hamdi Pasha under arrest and bring him with us," ordered Dick. He turned to the Turk. "If you are lying," he said, savagely, "you will never live to see another sunrise!"

Hamdi Pasha scowled and rose from his chair.

"I do not lie," he answered, haughtily, then to

his guests:—"I beg of you to finish your dinner, gentlemen." Then to Dick:—"The princess is in the fortress. If you think you can get her out, go ahead and do so."

For an instant Dick stared at him, puzzled and angry. He made an impatient motion of his hand to his troopers, who closed in about the Turk.

"If your prisoner tries to escape," said Dick, "your orders are to shoot him. March!"

With a brief salutation to the diners he walked to the door, the guard falling in behind him. They passed through the spacious antechamber and across the wide, marble-paved terrace, then down the steps, their sabres clanking behind them. They had just reached the horses and Dick was about to order that Hamdi's ankles be secured by a rope beneath the belly of his mount, when from the gloomy pile upon the opposite hill there came the report of a rifle-shot, followed by a rattling volley.

Dick, with one foot in the stirrup, paused to listen. Exhausted as he was the soldier instinct was as keenly alert as ever and it had struck his trained ear that the gunfire had not the sound of that from the carbines carried by the Akindschis. Moreover, he had hoped and expected to take the fortress without resistance.

As he listened the firing grew more rapid and he perceived that his judgment had been correct, for now he could clearly distinguish the bark of the

carbines from the sharp crack of the Turkish Mausers. There was no doubt that a very hard fight was going on. He swung himself into the saddle as smartly as his exhausted muscles would permit.

"Follow more slowly with your prisoner," he said to the lieutenant. "I must hurry over there and learn what all of this is about. Keep a dozen men with you; the rest may come with me."

The lieutenant gave a quick command and the party divided. Followed by his men Dick urged his game but tired horse down the steep slope, crossed the gully and was starting the ascent of the opposite side when a horseman came plunging out of the murk, the loose stones scattering from under his horse's hoofs.

"Halt!" cried Dick, sharply.

"Osborne Pasha——?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Osborne Pasha, our guide was misinformed. The Turkish garrison, four companies strong, which was stationed in the fortress, has not evacuated. The column sent to hold the road from Istria is another force which was brought to reinforce Hamdi Pasha by the commander at Rahut, who with all of his garrison has been persuaded to join forces with Hamdi Pasha. This command is about 500 strong, all Turkish infantry. Also we have learned that the princess is confined in the fortress——"

He paused for breath and Dick felt himself sagging in the saddle.

"What else——?" he demanded, in a strained voice.

The man hesitated, having the strong Oriental dislike of being the bearer of bad news.

"Speak!" growled Dick.

"We tried to enter as planned, passing ourselves off to the gate guard as the Montenegrin Sepahis. Colonel Razamachi Bey with about a third of our column had already entered when there came a volley through the entrance. Then the gates fell; those of us outside were driven to cover by a murderous fire from the ramparts and embrasures commanding the gates. We fell back in confusion and heard our comrades fighting within. Apparently it was a trap prepared to destroy us, but the dogs of Turks did not dare to admit our full force for fear of having more than they could swallow——. Allah blight them!"

"Then you think that the others have been destroyed?" cried Dick.

"I fear so, Osborne Pasha."

"There were—how many?"

"Fifty—perhaps more! The rest of us are now under cover about the walls."

Dick drew his breath deeply. For a minute he sat in utter silence, his head slightly sunk between his drooping shoulders. This news coming in the full flush of his triumph was almost too crushing,

too blasting for even such an indomitable spirit as his own. The troopers, clustering about him, had heard all that the messenger had reported, but no man uttered a sound. They were much too far gone with utter fatigue to do more than listen dumbly.

All then was lost, so far as one could see. There was the full garrison left in the fortress; half a regiment of Turkish infantry was blocking the road to Istria. The Karamanian fighting force was reduced to about 250 exhausted men, while at Istria their untrained, inefficient infantry and the regiment of Sepahis had scant ammunition for mere defence. One good card alone they held, and that was the person of Hamdi Pasha.

It is less in the hour of battle than at moments such as this that the natural leader of men stands revealed. Dick straightened himself in his saddle with a short laugh.

"It appears that there is still some work for us to do!" said he, briskly. "But we have had enough for one day. Come, let us go on and bivouac for the night."

He gathered up his reins and began the ascent of the hillside, his men following wearily. Before many minutes had passed the tumbling walls of the ancient fortress loomed sombrely against the star-lit sky. Suddenly the crisp night air was cut by a sharp challenge:—

"Who goes there——!"

"Osborne Pasha," answered Dick, and rode forward.

What was left of the Akindschis were dismounted and stretched in a crescent-shaped line on two sides of the fortress, the third and fourth sides being precipitous. As Dick advanced he was met by the young captain who had given him his horse after the fight with the Sepahis. The officer stepped forward and saluted.

"I have talked with your messenger," said Dick. "How many men have you got left?"

"Two hundred and seventy-one, Osborne Pasha, but of these about twenty are wounded, six too severely for duty."

"And officers?"

"One other captain and myself. Colonel Razamachi Bey has either been killed or captured—probably the former."

"You will take his place as colonel," said Dick. "The other captain is next in command, with the rank of major. Detail one man from every ten for picket duty and send out two squads to forage for food and horses. Then report to me with the major. Instruct the foraging squad to go to the palace yonder and have the servants bring whatever there is in the place. Give orders to shoot any man who refuses prompt obedience."

The officer saluted and hurried off. Dick dismounted and finding a sheltered place stretched himself out upon the ground. He was dozing fitfully

when the two officers returned. Both were very young, scarcely more than boys, but both were keen and intelligent.

"Gentlemen," said Dick. "We must have a council of war. We all understand the situation, which is a very bad one. So far as I can see the only point in our favour is that we hold the person of Hamdi Pasha, who is yonder, under guard. The question now is, how can we make use of our prisoner to our best advantage? Major, what is your opinion in the matter?"

CHAPTER XX

THE younger officer tugged for a moment at his black, wiry moustache. Of the three he was the least exhausted, having been with Razamachi's division during the fight with the Sepahis.

"It seems to me, Osborne Pasha," said he, finally, "that since the whole movement hangs upon Hamdi Pasha himself the best thing to do would be to order him shot, at once, and in the morning to send his head to the fortress with the demand to surrender. With Hamdi Pasha dead there would no longer be any object for the campaign and we would no doubt be able to make profitable terms. On the contrary, as long as Hamdi is alive there is still a cause; also the danger of his possible escape."

Dick nodded, then turned to the other man.

"What is your opinion, colonel?" he asked.

"The plan of the major is reasonable," said the young man, "but there are certain objections to acting upon it immediately. It must be remembered that the commander of the Turkish garrison at Rahut, Major Achmet Bey, who has come over to Hamdi with all of his force, has by so doing burned his bridges behind him. His life is now forfeit to the sultan, so that it is probable that on learning of Hamdi's execution he would appoint himself as Hamdi's successor. Achmet Bey is a brave, intelli-

gent and able man, and he commands a very efficient battalion. I would therefore recommend that we order Hamdi Pasha, on pain of death, to send an order commanding the garrison in the fortress to surrender, and a messenger to Achmet Bey advising him to return to his post, stating that all is lost."

Dick reflected for a few moments in silence, then slowly shook his head.

"The plan is well thought," said he, "but it would not succeed. Hamdi is a proud man and no coward. He would not do it. He would die first."

"In that case," said the colonel, "I would advise that he be shot."

There followed a silence which was broken only by the snores of the tired sleepers, lying on their arms near by. Finally Dick said:—

"As long as Hamdi is alive, we have got a hostage for the princess."

Neither of the officers replied immediately. Presently, however, the colonel remarked in a cold voice:—

"It seems to me, Osborne Pasha, that our cause is not the princess—but Karamania!"

The major nodded. "That is my opinion," said he.

Dick felt himself torn by a fierce, inward struggle. His two young officers were quite right, and he knew it. And yet, the thought that the Princess Lilear was there, behind those frowning walls a

prisoner in the hands of savage men, was intolerable. He did not try to analyse his emotions; did not even question himself as to why this knowledge should be so maddening, but it tortured him none the less. Here within his grasp was Hamdi, whom he knew that he could exchange for the princess at any moment—and he knew also that to do so would be to knock the last prop from under the tottering edifice of Karamanian liberty! It would mean the utter failure of the brilliant campaign and would render futile and useless the lives laid down by the loyal little soldiers who had fought so faithfully under his command.

Yet, he reflected, he was sworn first to the service of the princess, and afterwards to that of Karamania. He groaned inwardly at the thought of what her fate might be when it was learned by her captors that Hamdi had been shot and that the cause of Karamania was lost. As for Hamdi himself, Dick was a sufficiently able judge of Ottoman character to know that the Turk would die a dozen deaths before he would order the surrender of the fortress to his enemy. With all of his duplicity there was no fear in the Turk; he was a proud man and a brave one and in his hatred of Dick he would go cheerfully to the bosom of Allah before he would submit to his demands.

For several minutes Dick fought hard within himself. He had no compunctions about ordering Hamdi's immediate execution, but he reflected that even if

this savage Oriental method were to be carried out the garrison might nevertheless refuse to surrender, in which case, not only would Karamania be lost, but the princess herself might become the victim of any violence. This doubt he expressed to the two officers, who merely raised their shoulders.

"That is of course possible, Osborne Pasha," replied the major, "especially if they have learned of our weakness in numbers. But there is still the chance of their surrendering, and it does not seem as if that should be lost for the sake of one woman, no matter who she may be."

Dick set his lips tightly.

"What if we were to attempt the assault of the fortress—towards morning, after we have had a little food and rest?"

The colonel shook his head.

"It could not be done, Osborne Pasha," said he. "The men are exhausted to the point of death. Most of them are also wounded more or less severely, and by that time their wounds will have stiffened and they would be unfit for a hard fight. You yourself are scarcely able to sit upright, from fatigue. Moreover, the place, although partly in ruins, is nevertheless very strong. After three hours' sleep the men would merely stumble in to be slaughtered. Reflect on the work done by the Akindschis this day, Osborne Pasha!"

Dick nodded. He knew that the two officers were in the right.

The major yawned. "There is no doubt," said he, "that the immediate execution of Hamdi Pasha and the demand for the surrender of the fortress is our only chance. We should not even delay until to-morrow morning, or it might be too late. The news of our enfeebled condition will reach Achmet Bey, when he would no doubt return and attack us here. Even if the garrison was to make a sortie at dawn it is doubtful if we could hold our own."

"There is one other alternative," said Dick, "which has not yet been mentioned. If we could manage to get a courier through at once to Istria, General Kostovo with our Sepahis might attack the Turks under Achmet. The Sepahis are not a very efficient force, I know, and are scant of ammunition, but it would at least give us a little more time. Then, as soon as the Turkish infantry who surrendered to Razamachi arrives, we might perhaps get the munitions to General Kostovo. They are now in the hands of the prisoner's guard."

The officers looked doubtful.

"We might still do that if our other plan fails," observed the major. "But it seems to me that Hamdi should be shot, and at once."

Again Dick's heart sank in his bosom. His own strategic instinct had noted this point even as he spoke, but he could not bring himself to leave the princess' safety unprotected by a hostage. To Hamdi himself he gave not a single thought; in his opinion the Turk had broken all the rules of the

game, if rules there ever were in Balkan warfare, when he waged it against the person of a woman, and in Dick's judgment his life was certainly forfeit. The question was merely one of the princess herself.

But love is love and war is war and Dick, if unconsciously a lover, was primarily a soldier. What is a soldier? Purely literally, from the derivation of the word a soldier is a person "who is paid"—to fight, being understood. But if one were to define "soldier" in its higher sense one might say that the real soldier is an individual who in making war is bound always to sacrifice personal interest to a general cause. Such a soldier is the ant, the bee, the peccary, the patriot of any country which has ever fought for liberty—most recently in history, typified by the Japanese. The Roman legionary was a fine example of a soldier, for with him the general cause lay entirely within the commands received from his officers. And the general himself was a soldier whose general cause was transferred still higher.

Such a soldier was Dick, and although the cause to which he was first sworn was the princess herself, yet she was rather the emblem than the principle, and that principle was Karamanian liberty, and it was for this that he had that day sent many men to their deaths. He realised this fully, and with inward anguish was about to give the order for Hamdi's execution when there came an interruption.

From the picket stationed on the broad causeway leading up to the fortress there arose a sharp challenge and a moment later a horseman, accompanied by a corporal, was seen riding down the line toward the place where the three officers were sitting. As they approached it was evident that the pony was badly blown, and when the rider had dismounted the distressed animal stood with feet spread well apart, eyes bulging and sides working like bellows. The rider was apparently one of the Karamanian hill-men herders, such as raise perhaps four foals yearly to be in time disposed of in the horse-market at Karoz. The man approached Dick and saluted.

"Who are you?" demanded Dick.

"A messenger, effendi, from General Kostovo."

"Speak—or have you brought a letter?"

"No, effendi, my message lies only upon my tongue, lest it fall into the hands of the enemy."

As the man spoke he turned to his horse and began to loosen the saddle-girth.

"Never mind the horse!" said Dick, impatiently. "Speak!"

"Yes, effendi—but Bulbul here is as the light of my life and the mother of five——"

"Speak, jackal!" snarled the colonel, starting up.

"Yes, effendi. General Kostovo bids me say that he has learned from your couriers of the destruction of the dervishes, and sends you his praise, and he has learned of the destruction of the Mon-

tenegrin Sepahis and sends you praise and blessings in the name of Karamania. And now, knowing that you must have suffered heavy loss, he does not await orders but is marching to your support with his Sepahis. That is all, effendim. Is there water here that I may rinse out the mouth of Bulbul and cool her head before the blood mounts——?"

"Which way did you come?" asked Dick. "By the direct road from Istria?"

"Yes, effendi, by the direct road. But half way here I ran into a Turkish *zaptié*. I did not know that it was there until I was almost in their midst; then I turned quickly into the sand-hills. They fired on me, but it was dark and only one bullet found it's mark and that but grazed the flank of Bulbul. Once we left them behind she sped swifter than their bullets——" He gave the rollicking Karamanian laugh. "So if you have water here, effendi, order it brought, for Bulbul has served Karamania well this night. *Chock yasha Karamania!*"

"Your mare can wait," said Dick, sternly. "A great many brave men as well as horses have died for Karamania to-day. Tell me, does General Kostovo know nothing of the Turks upon the road to Istria?"

"He will know by this, effendi, for I passed by the house of a herder and roused him up and bid him ride back to Istria with the news. But Bulbul——"

"You have done well," said Dick. "Now lead

your Bulbul to the gully at the foot of the hill and you will find water in plenty. Then as soon as you have provided for Bulbul, return to me here."

The herder raised his hand to his head, then walked away leading his staggering mare. Dick turned to the two officers.

"This puts a different face on the matter," he observed. "General Kostovo will probably hang on the rear of the Turkish column and whether he actually attacks or not he will at least hold it in check and prevent it from attacking us here. That is a good move of General Kostovo's."

"Osborne Pasha," said the colonel, "why would it not be a good plan for us to sleep until dawn—let us say, for five hours, then leaving a small force of perhaps fifty men here to march to the support of General Kostovo with the rest. By that time Achmet will no doubt have decided that he has been made a fool of by Hamdi who probably told him when he passed through Karoz that the Karamanians were defeated and that all he need do was to march in and occupy Istria. When Achmet finds the Sepahis on his heels and the Akindschis at his throat and learns that Hamdi himself is a prisoner, he may be persuaded to march back whence he came."

"And if the garrison here should make a sortie?"

"That is not probable, but if it should happen, our men can mount and fall back upon us, toward Istria."

Dick nodded. "That is a good plan," he answered. "We are now fairly well supplied with ammunition, thanks to the Montenegrin mode of fighting, and to-morrow, when the troop guarding the Turks who surrendered to Razamachi arrive, we will have arms and ammunition in plenty. We will act then according to what you suggest, colonel. You yourself will remain here in command of the besieging party while the major and I will ride to the support of General Kostovo. Now send me that messenger from Istria."

The major departed, to return a few moments later with the herder. Dick motioned the man to draw near.

"Do you love your country, my friend?" he asked.

"Of course I do, effendi."

"Then you may do her a further service. You will start back at once to meet General Kostovo, taking good care to avoid the Turks. Tell the general that Osborne Pasha will ride to his assistance at daybreak. Do you understand?"

"Yes, effendi—but Bulbul is not fit."

"Allah's curse on you, can you think of nothing but your horse when your country is bleeding?" cried Dick, harshly. "You will be given a fresh horse directly. Then go. Tell General Kostovo that perhaps we may start an hour before the dawn, if the men are fit. Now repeat to me what I have said!"



The man did so, accurately.

"Good." Dick turned to the major.

"Look after this fellow," said he, "and see to it that he is well mounted——" His words were cut short by a great yawn. "Now I must sleep, if I am to fight again to-morrow morning. God grant that we find fresh horses for our men. That is all for to-night. Have me called an hour before the dawn."

He flung himself face downward upon the dry turf, drew in his limbs and was instantly plunged in the deep sleep of utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXI

At Istria, General Kostovo, after despatching his courier to Dick, gave orders that the Sepahis should be ready to march at two of the morning. He then went into the garden for the philosophic smoke in which he was wont to indulge before retiring.

Considering the news which he had received of the brilliant success of the Akindschis in their wonderful raid, one might have thought that the general's heart would have been steeped in satisfaction; but this was far from being the case, for General Kostovo was a patriot whereof the patriotism began at home—in his own quarters. He was far more interested in the future of Kostovo than in that of Karamania and it had been his ambition to further both interests side by side. But in the situation as it now stood he felt that Karamania was rapidly outstripping him, and that unless there was some immediate and vigorous action on his part he might not be in sight at the finish. Even as he sat, luxuriously puffing the last of his cigar, there was wafted to him on the soft night breeze the sound of song and shouting in the village beneath, for Istria was in that first flush of joyous victory which precedes the list of killed and wounded. The following night, or as soon as the details were

known, there was destined to be many a heartache in the hills.

Kostovo smoked, soliloquised and scowled. He was glad of course that the Akindschis had swept all before them, but he was disturbed that his own part in it should have been practically *nil*, so far as being a prominent figure was concerned. There was too much Osborne Pasha in the broth, too much Razamachi Bey, and he was not at all sure but that there might be within the next few days, too much Princess Lilear! It was this consideration, more than any strategy or generalship, which had prompted him to send his courier, saying that he was coming to the support of Osborne Pasha.

Kostovo finished his cigar, and walked leisurely across the garden toward the palace. As he came within the zone of light from the long French windows he saw a white-clad figure rise from a marble bench beneath the olive-trees.

"Is that General Kostovo?" came the low, musical voice which never failed to set the old war-dog's pulses tingling.

"Yes, Countess von Essingen. I am on my way to bed as I expect to set out for Karoz at two of the morning."

"To Karoz?"

"To Karoz. I am going with the Sepahis in case Osborne Pasha should need assistance, although I do not see how that is possible. At any rate, Karoz must be occupied and no doubt the Akindschis have

been badly mauled and will need to come back to Istria for repairs. Ah, he is a great fighter, this dear Dick of ours! Is he not? It is a pity that his talents could not have been employed in bigger fields than these little penny-whistle wars and revolutions! But never mind. The day will surely come! Just wait until Bulgaria declares her independence and the great Powers become involved and this Balkan Peninsula of ours becomes the vortex of one of the greatest wars which the world shall ever have seen——!" The old fellow rubbed his hands. "Then there will be something which is worth while! Then our Dick shall have his opportunity!"

Edith drew in her breath deeply. "I hope that by that time he will have found some other profession," she said, with a little laugh. "Why do men like so much to kill each other?"

"Why? Because we are men, I suppose. Love and war, madam, war and love! They are the two things which real men most love and for which the real women most love them!"

"You are epigrammatic to-night. Tell me, have you heard from——" Edith's voice slightly changed its note, "the princess?"

Kostovo laughed. "Do not let us worry about the princess. No, I have not yet heard. But Osborne Pasha now holds Karoz, and in any case the princess is quite well able to take care of herself.

No doubt Hamdi has many times cursed the folly which led him to abduct her. Especially as if he had not, all of this would never have occurred! Osborne Pasha and the sheiks were ready to fly at each others' throats because he was all for temporising and they for immediate action; then came the news that Hamdi Pasha had abducted my niece, and half an hour later our dear Dick and the Akindschis sweep like a cyclone around Karamania! And behold the result!" He scowled, and Edith whose eyes were studying his face as closely as the darkness would permit, did not miss the expression. "Between you and me, madam," said Kostovo, dropping his voice, "Osborne Pasha and the princess are in love with each other—and don't know it!" He gave a somewhat forced laugh. "Ah, *l'amour—l'amour!*" said he, rolling up his eyes to the glittering stars.

Edith regarded him intently, her eyebrows slightly raised.

"Do you think that Osborne Pasha now holds Karoz, the fortress and all?" she asked.

"There can be no doubt of it. More than that, it is probable that he has either killed or captured Hamdi; the former, probably, as I do not think that the scoundrel would surrender. It is also probable that Osborne Pasha has captured the princess." Edith saw his white teeth flash through his beard in a mirthless grin. "*Eh bien!* To the vic-

tor belong the spoils—is it not so, madam? And there is no stopping such a man as our dear Dick, in love or war!"

"General," said Edith, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Your own niece, too!"

Kostovo shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Why not?" he growled. "Ah, my dear madam, I am afraid that old Kostovo is still a bit of an Oriental. Personally I should very much regret such a state of affairs. It would not tend toward the best interests of Karamania."

"It certainly would not!" answered Edith, viciously. "It would mean that Osborne Pasha would rule it with a rod of iron—and there would be no little plums for anybody but his princess!"

Kostovo gave her a sidelong glance from under his bushy brows and if it had not been so dark Edith might have seen an awakening intelligence in his small, beady eyes. The savage cut in Edith's voice had betrayed a state of heart which Kostovo had for some time suspected and it suddenly occurred to his not over-acute intelligence that here perhaps was another factor in his little game of empire; a pawn, a castle—perhaps even a queen, which might, if skilfully moved, be played to his great advantage.

"You are right, madam," he answered, nodding his shaggy head. "Osborne Pasha is a brave man and a good fighter, but he is a soldier of fortune and a poor man. Whether he loves her or not it would be nothing strange if he were to make love

to the princess and marry her, when as consort he could play the part of Dictator and carry things with a high hand. With Osborne Pasha as her husband, my niece becomes an actual power to be reckoned with; heretofore she has been merely a figurehead."

"Does she know that?"

"No," replied Kostovo. "She thinks that she is, and has been right along, the pivotal point of the whole movement."

"As far as I can see, she has," said Edith, drily.

"That is true. Now there is no doubt that she is in love with Osborne Pasha. I know the symptoms in women of her haughty, self-contained type——" Again the beady eyes slanted toward Edith, who was looking out over the night-filled valley. "—and if given the proper opportunity it is very possible that the two of them might join forces. This would sadly complicate matters."

"For *you*?" Edith flashed out, turning quickly.

"For Karamania," muttered Kostovo, slightly startled.

"Which is to say," observed Edith in a dry voice, "for General Kostovo."

"You are a very discerning woman, madam," snapped Kostovo.

"We have much in common."

"Such as——"

"Oh, stop beating around the bush, general!" cried Edith, impatiently. "Don't you suppose I

see what you are driving at? Do you think I am a fool? There is no reason why we should not be frank and have a perfect understanding. *You* want Karamania——"

"Countess——" The general threw out his hands.

Edith went on impatiently. "You want Karamania. Why not? Who has a better right? It is all of your doing—all of the planning and study. You are the one who has spent the sleepless nights and the busy days—the fitting of means to ends! If Karamania is free to-night it is *not* Osborne Pasha, for all his brilliant raid, who has brought it about. It is General Kostovo!"

"That is true——" muttered Kostovo.

"It is evident enough to anyone with intelligence," Edith continued, "but the common people always look at the spectacular side and the others, who understand, are apt to be self-interested and not put the credit where it is due. There is nobody so blind, general, as he who will not see!"

"*Sapristi!*" growled Kostovo, "but you are right!"

"It has been plain to me right along," continued Edith, speaking slowly, "that the real patriot, the real father of his country, was General Kostovo!"

The old soldier threw out his chest.

"But everybody," Edith went on, "will not see it as I do. The public is carried away by stirring deeds, not by long planning and carefully worked



out details. Who are the people down there in the Plaza shouting for to-night? General Kostovo? Not a bit of it! It is for Osborne Pasha—and to some extent Colonel Razamachi Bey. They do not remember that any such person as General Kostovo exists!"

"*Mash Allah*——!"

"But you know that it is true. And if Osborne Pasha were to marry the princess at Karoz and return with her to Istria the people would hail them as king and queen—and no one would remember that General Kostovo had ever had anything to do with it at all!"

She glanced at him slyly. Kostovo's eyes were blazing like those of a cat.

"On the contrary," Edith went on in her silky voice, "if Osborne Pasha were to leave the country, now that his work is finished, it would be evident to the people that he was merely a paid fighting-man brought here by the wise and subtle General Kostovo to do a certain duty——"

"*Mash Allah!*" cried Kostovo, "but I believe you are right! You are a wonderful woman, Countess von Essingen!"

Edith stepped in front of him and threw out both hands, palms upward. The light from the long windows shone full upon her lovely face and brought out the fine texture of the satiny skin of neck and arms, while her eyes, in the shadow, glowed with fathomless depth. All of her coquetry, all of the

nymph-like allure was swept for the moment aside, and the passion beneath blazed for the moment undisguised.

"General Kostovo," she said, "we are natural allies, you and I. We are held together by the strongest of all compacts—a mutual interest *You* want Karamania. *I* want—Osborne Pasha!"

For a moment they faced each other in silence. Then Kostovo said in a lower tone:—

"And if so——?"

"You help me and I will help you! Continue to make the princess believe that she is the central figure—the Queen elect, but explain to her that if she were to marry Osborne Pasha she would be forced to abdicate, as the people would not submit to a foreigner as their prince consort. Tell her anything! Appeal to her patriotism. And keep them apart as much as possible!"

"And Osborne Pasha?"

"Explain to the sheiks the new danger that threatens them—that of despotism by a foreigner. Start a sentiment against his remaining, now that his work is finished. Send good talkers amongst the people to say that he is trying to make himself king of Karamania, and that he needlessly sacrificed the lives of his men—tell them anything! Don't you understand?"

"*Sapristi*, madam, but you have peculiar ideas of love!"

"Oh, bosh! I will make it all up to him when he



is mine—as he is going to be! There is very little, my dear general, that I have not to offer. But there is no time to lose. You are riding to Karoz to-night. You will reach there in the early morning, will you not? The chances are that Osborne Pasha will have been too much occupied with his duties scarcely more than to have seen the princess. I must be there before those two have a chance to be together alone. General Kostovo, you must let me go to Karoz with you!"

Kostovo stared at her for a moment, then nodded.

"That would not be a bad plan," he growled. "But——" his face grew doubtful, "what if Hamdi should still have something up his sleeve? What if we should run into more fighting?"

Edith threw back her head and laughed. "What if there is? You have seen me fight, haven't you?"

"*Mash Allah*, yes! But I did not enjoy it!" He shook his head. "However, I do not see how there can be any more trouble—fortunately, as the Sepahis have scarcely ammunition enough for a skirmish, and they are rather a ragged lot at the best. All of the picked men were mustered into the Akindschis. So come, then, if you like, madam; it is a thirty-mile ride, but that is nothing for such a woman as yourself, mounted upon a Karamanian nag. I will tell my orderly to rap upon your door half an hour before the start."

CHAPTER XXII

Promptly at the time appointed the Sepahis rode out of Istria. General Kostovo despatched four scouts to report his coming to Dick, then, with Edith riding at his side, led the column down the side of the mountain.

The Sepahis did not represent a very formidable fighting array. Kostovo had caused the ammunition to be distributed only to those men best able to make use of their firearms, so that a good half of the squadron, although carrying their carbines, were armed only with their sabres. It was quite a different force in every way from the carefully picked and thoroughly drilled Akindschis. The troopers of Kostovo's command were for the most part small farmers, herders and corn-growers, while the horses which they rode were more accustomed to the plough than to the saddle. But they were a sturdy and courageous lot, like all of their breed, and seemed quite good enough for the mere policing of Karoz.

It was on the whole with considerable elation that Kostovo set out upon his march. He had a very huge respect for the talents and capabilities of the woman riding at his side, and found it quite impossible to imagine how any man in his proper senses,

if given free choice, could look twice at a turbulent, headstrong creature like his niece when wooed by so ravishing a woman as the Countess von Essingen. As she herself said, there were few things which she did not have within her power to offer; youth, unusual beauty, position, great wealth and a nature whereof the bounty was if anything sometimes in excess. Kostovo's personal attitude toward the other sex being almost purely Oriental, he could not understand such a thing as love in the abstract, and therefore considered the one obstacle to his ambitions as good as removed.

He would have felt rather differently had he known that at the moment of his riding out of Istria the torn and ragged fragments of the invincible Akindschis were scattered along the ground in front of the fortress at Karoz, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion and of insufficient strength merely to hold the place in siege, while halfway between himself and Karoz there was bivouacked on either side of the road a full battalion of Turkish infantry. The herder, despatched by Dick, had miscalculated the position of the Turks, and afraid to make too great a detour for fear of missing Kostovo, had run slap into a Turkish outpost where his horse was shot under him and he himself taken prisoner.

Kostovo sang softly to himself as he rode down the side of the mountain in the waning light of an old moon. Then he looked at Edith and chuckled. She was dressed in her tan-coloured costume, riding

astride, spurred and booted, while the little silver-mounted revolver which she had used with such deadly effect not many days before, swung in a holster from her belt. Her abundant hair was done snugly on the top of her head and she wore a jaunty little hat of the Continental soldier fashion.

Kostovo looked curiously at the pretty profile, the strong, supple figure, noticed the fearless pose of the small, aristocratic head and growled something to himself.

"What is that, general?" asked Edith, turning to him with a smile.

"Nothing—at least I was just saying to myself that Osborne Pasha is a lucky dog!"

"Why?"

"*Mash Allah!* But you would not ask if you were a man and could see the picture which you make, dark as it is!"

Edith laughed, then sighed. Kostovo glanced at her quickly.

"It is my own fault that I have to work so hard to get him," said she, with an amusing naïveté. "I was engaged to marry Osborne Pasha, then jilted him to marry the Count von Essingen. I wanted the social position. You see, general, my brother and I had barrels of money but no place whatever in society. My father began life as a cowboy and my mother was waitress in a railroad restaurant on the plains of Arizona."

Kostovo gasped. "One would not hesitate to



swear that you were noble born!" he cried. "Your type—your wit and grace and manner! You astonish me!"

"That is the American of it—an American legacy. Jim looks thoroughbred too—and he was born in a mud cabin. You see, general, we Americans have very often plenty of good blood back of us some distance, and fallen fortunes in between. Then, as soon as we are able to afford it, we naturally want to rise to our proper level again. I had to be at the top—so I jilted poor Dick!"

"And how did he take it?"

"Quietly enough. But it was on that account, I think, that he resigned his commission in our army and became a soldier of fortune. Then I married that wretched creature, my late husband, and spent a few awful years, and now I am free and got my position assured and want Dick—awfully!" She laughed.

Kostovo stared at her.

"I think that you will get him," said he. "In fact, I think that you would get almost anything that you might happen to want—and a good deal that you did not!" he added drily.

"I've had both. But I never wanted anything as much as—Dick!" she said, with a little laugh which was slightly tremulous.

Again Kostovo threw her a keen glance from under his shaggy brows. It was too dark for him to see her face, for they had entered the heavy beech

forest which clothed the hills below Istria right down to the plain. From behind them came the rumble of many hoofs and the mutter from many throats, for the Karamanians are a loquacious folk and find it impossible to keep silence in the ranks for long at a time.

Presently they reached the foot of the mountain, when the road emerged from the wood and wound tortuously between steep, rocky hills, mostly bare, but in places studded with dwarfed trees and bracken, for the soil was poor and sandy. For some miles their route followed the banks of a stream, almost dry, its bed strewn with boulders and here and there with pools of standing water which gleamed like ink under the dark sky, for the late moon had set and the dawn was still unannounced in the east.

Kostovo and his companion had drawn considerably in advance of the column, and as they were rounding a rocky buttress the general suddenly drew rein and held up his hand.

"*Stoi!* (halt)" said he, sharply.

Edith pulled up her pony and waited. For a moment both sat silent and listening. From the mountainside which they had left came the howling of dogs, hunting alone. A great, heavy bird, startled from his haunt in the river, winged over their heads, croaking discordantly. Then the jar and rumble of the approaching column shut out other sounds.

"*Mash Allah!*" growled Kostovo, "but I thought that I heard gun shots!" He looked at Edith. "Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"Then it must have been imagination. My ears are no longer of the best. Besides, why should there have been firing? If there were any refugees from Hamdi's following they certainly would not have fled towards Istria!" He swung impatiently in his saddle. "How slowly that column travels! It is not like riding with the Akindschis, is it, Countess von Essingen?"

"It is more like riding with a funeral!"

"Allah grant that it will not be as bad as that! Suppose we leave them to my colonel and push on for Karoz. After all, what is the use of our loitering along like this? The sooner we see Osborne Pasha the better."

"We *must* see him as soon as possible."

"That is true. We will ride on. If we overtake the advance guard, which is not likely, we will keep it for an escort." He swung in his saddle and said some words to an orderly who was following a few paces in the rear. The man wheeled his horse and disappeared in the murk. A few minutes later he rejoined them.

"Come," said Kostovo, "let us push along."

They lifted their reins and the eager horses sprang forward to strike the swift, smooth, singlefoot gait for which their breed is famous. Edith threw back

her shoulders, straightened her strong, graceful body and filled her lungs deeply with the sweet, night air. Thrill after thrill rushed through her as they sped along in the darkness and it seemed to her that at last her real life had actually begun. Every strong, vital instinct of her profuse nature was vibrating to the pitch of her surroundings, while the romance of the situation set her pulses tingling. The whole night had been replete with vivid impressions; her conference with Kostovo in the gardens of the palace with the stale moonlight edging the ancient ruins with silver and old gold; her stealthy preparations, slipping out with Kostovo through the little postern gate—the same where she had betrayed the princess to Hamdi—then down the steep, zigzag path to the esplanade below where the Sepahis were drawn up, clanking and glittering and muttering throughout their ranks. Then the sharp, staccato orders in the strange-sounding tongue, the rumble of hundreds of hoofs on the flinty road, the ride down the wooded mountainside with the smell of the ferns and autumn leaves and the tinkle of water far beneath in the ravine.

And now, best of all, the swift flight under the glittering, star-sewn sky! Only Kostovo and herself and the orderly—and their goal the man she loved! The hero of two battles, the brief description of which had held her breathless and quivering! She was going to him now, as swiftly as safety would permit—more swiftly, it seemed to her, con-



sidering the character of the road they travelled, but little she cared for that. On all sides rose the encompassing hills, bare, rocky, desolate.

Scarcely a thought did Edith give to the princess, nor had she felt the slightest pang of remorse for her treachery. A wild, savage, half-tamed Oriental she judged her hostess, and if Dick was for the moment attracted to her he was soon to be taught to feel differently. Edith had seen too great evidence of her own power to feel much fear of the princess, provided she herself was able to take a hand in the game. She reflected that all was fair in love and war, and hers was both.

They crossed the river, which was almost dry, then scrambled up the cobbly bank on the other side, where the road wound through tumbling sand hills, or what would be called in America "hammock-land." Here the trail was somewhat better and they raised their pace to a smooth gallop.

"Here comes the dawn," said Kostovo, presently.

Edith slightly swung in her saddle to look over her shoulder. As she did so two black figures rose suddenly from a low sand hill to the left and stood black and titanesque against the paling sky. There followed a sharp challenge in Turkish, then an oath from Kostovo.

"*Sapristi!*" he snarled, "these men are none of ours! Ride, madam—ride!"

Their horses sprang forward like antelope as they drove home their spurs. Two rifles cracked almost

in their ears. There came a scream from the orderly and the next instant his riderless horse, snorting with pain, swept abreast of Edith and between her and the enemy. Two more shots and the animal was down and as Edith glanced over her shoulder she saw it floundering in the road. Another report, and she heard a whistling close to her ear and a pulse of air against her face.

She and Kostovo were racing neck and neck. From behind them came shouts and cries and men were pouring out into the road from the hollows between the dunes. Then a mass of dark figures surged out on the trail ahead of them and they caught the dull glitter of the pale light on steel.

"To the right!" cried Kostovo. "Into that gully on the right! *Mash Allah*—but—this is a Turkish—crowd——! To the right!"

They swung their horses into the gully and none too soon, for as Edith plunged in between the sandhills there came a scattering fire from ahead and the whistle of bullets behind them. They heard in the distance the scampering of horses' hoofs, for their own mounts made no noise as they laboured through the deep sand. Presently the rift which they were following forked, then became so tortuous that they were obliged to slacken their pace. Glancing at Kostovo, Edith saw that he was swaying slightly in his saddle.

"Are you hit?" she asked quickly.

"Through the shoulder. To the right—now to

the left—*Mash Allah!*—what a business! The Sepahis will ride slap into that crowd—as the scouts must have done—as we did ourselves!—now to the left again——"

Edith glanced back. "There were some horsemen following us," she said. "I don't hear them at all now, so they must have turned into the sand."

"Yes? Here we come to an open space. Now ride for that black opening beyond! Once in the scrub we are safe for the moment!"

They flew across the white sand and as they did so there came several shots from the tops of the hillocks, the bullets whistling close. Unhurt, however, they gained the thicket of scrub oaks and thorn trees into which they dashed, scarcely drawing rein, although scratched and torn by the low boughs. A hundred metres and Edith's hat was gone, her hair streaming about her shoulders and her face badly scratched.

"To the left——" panted Kostovo. "*Sapristi*, but this is rough work! I do not know that bullets are so much worse!"

At the end of several hundred yards he drew rein, pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his bleeding face.

"One might as well be shot as torn to rags by these devilish thorns! Are you hurt, my dear lady?"

"Only in appearance," said Edith.

"Your courage is still intact, I'll warrant. You are a wonder. But now we must get back to our Sepahis, by hook or crook."

"How about your wound——?"

"That can wait! It is not serious. My shoulder is drilled through by a high-power bullet, but I do not think that it has touched the bone. That crowd must be the Turkish garrison from Rahut; I heard that there was the possibility that it might go over to Hamdi. It was an outpost we dashed into back there! They must have passed through Karoz last night before the arrival of Osborne Pasha. Perhaps he has not even gone on to Karoz! This is a dreadful mess!"

From somewhere close at hand there came the crashing of boughs and in the dim half-light they saw a dark, moving figure. Kostovo half raised his carbine, then let it fall again as the horseman moved on and disappeared.

"It is not going to be so easy for us to get out of this!" he whispered. "You had better stop here where you are until it gets light. Then ride out and give yourself up. You might get shot, otherwise."

Edith gave a contemptuous little sniff. "Surrender yourself, if you like," said she. "*I* am going to try for Karoz!"

"For Karoz!"

"Yes."

"But why Karoz?"

"To warn Osborne Pasha. To tell him that these Turks are between the two of you."

"But—*Mash Allah!* But you would never get there!"

"I'll have a try for it. Now we'd better be moving before it gets any lighter."

Kostovo made the growling sounds of a sulky bear.

"You don't know the road!" said he. "You would get lost—and you might get shot into the bargain. They have probably got pickets thrown right across this valley!"

Edith pushed out her small, resolute chin.

"Don't worry about me; I grew up on an Arizona ranch, so there's not much chance of my getting lost in this little quarter section of a country! And I've been chased by hostiles and lain out all night in the grass because the Indians were between me and the ranch! I'm no shorthorn!"

"I do not know what you are!" grunted Kostovo, who was holding one hand to his wounded shoulder, "except that you are American! That seems to fit any sort of faculty—and particularly of a warlike kind! Try it, then, if you like, my dear, and if you get through tell Dick Pasha that the Turks block the road to Istria and that I will hang on their flanks until I hear from him. It would be madness for me to offer battle with my Sepahis. You had better ride for the foot of those steep hills—Allah! but it is getting very light——"

His speech was cut short by the sound of calls close at hand. It was evident that the Turkish commander had thrown a line of skirmishers to beat out the scrub.

Edith picked up her reins. "Au revoir——" she whispered. "Good luck to you!"

"Good luck to you, dear madam—and God bless you!" whispered Kostovo.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE rapidly growing daylight helped Edith to pick her way through the closely-woven scrub. Presently she struck a little path which, as it led away from the road, she followed for some distance until it began gradually to ascend, leading away from the direction where lay her route, so she struck off from it and began again to thread her way through the scrub, which was at this point even thicker and thornier than before. At the end of ten minutes of painful progress she found herself on the edge of the open ground. At the same moment she heard a bugle sound from the Turkish camp and Edith guessed that it was the "rally" to recall the skirmishers, the Turks having no doubt got wind of the advancing column of Sepahis.

For several moments she waited, under cover of the scrub, and looking warily on all sides. The day was brightening rapidly and distant objects were begining to take form and colour. Ahead of her stretched the same formation of low, tumbling hillocks intersected by shapeless hollows, while on either side of the narrow valley rose the higher, flanking hills. No living creature was in sight, so with a deep breath Edith gathered up her reins and rode out between the nearest sand hills.

For the first hundred yards she was able to pick

her way along the hollows, but presently she found herself at the end of a cul-de-sac where there was no choice but to ride over the mound ahead. Up the side of this her nimble pony scrambled like a cat and as he reached the summit Edith drew rein for an instant to get her bearings. The sun had almost reached the rim of low-lying hills to the left; already the long rays were flashing toward the turquoise sky. Edith took a quick survey on all sides; ahead the sand hills appeared to smooth out into longer undulations and far in the distance she caught a glimpse of the white road stretched like a piece of tape over a rise in the ground. Here and there were patches of scrub trees and on the horizon a giant plane tree stood out upon the summit of a high ridge.

As Edith was rapidly marking out her course the sun pushed its red rim over the brow of the opposite hill and a vivid ray flashed across the valley. Realising the danger of her position she swung her pony's head to ride down, but as she did so there came a shout from the right and a horseman appeared on the top of a mound not one hundred yards distant.

Edith gave her pony the spur and was down the side of the slope and off like a swallow. There came another shout from the left and as she mounted another piece of steep ground which lay in her path she looked back and saw that there were two horsemen in pursuit.



Edith was well mounted, but so were the Turks, one of them, a captain, on his own arab, and the other, a non-com., riding one of the Karamanian horses captured from Kostovo's scouts. The Turks were both small, light men, good riders, and had the advantage of the pursuer in aiming always for a focal point and not having to map out the easiest and most direct route.

On reaching the edge of the sand hills Edith had slightly lengthened her lead, but she had done this at considerable cost, for the deep sand made heavy going. The Turks, knowing the character of the country and that it was firm and open farther on, had saved their horses. With the hard turf once under their hoofs they raised the pace, their horses running well within themselves, while Edith's pony was rather blown. But the little Karamanian was game and never slackened. Over the dry, springy sod they flew, an interval of perhaps 500 metres between them, and the bright sunlight flooding the valley with its mellow light.

Edith's hair had tumbled loose again and was swept behind her like a golden flame. She had raised herself in the stirrups and was riding jockey-wise, sparing her pony as much as possible and holding straight as an arrow for the white patch of road some miles ahead. Glancing back every few seconds she saw that the Turkish officer was gradually gaining, and at the end of a mile he had shortened up her lead to not over a hundred yards, while

the other man had fallen considerably in the rear. Looking under her arm, jockey-fashion, Edith saw that he was a trim, wiry, handsome young fellow and even at the distance she could see the expression of perplexity on his face and with it a sort of fierce impatience. Evidently, he had recognised that his quarry was a woman and was no doubt greatly puzzled as to the character of the game which he had beaten up.

It was evident to Edith that she must soon be overtaken. The Turk's horse was running easily, while her own mount was beginning to show signs of distress. For a moment she thought of her pistol, but quickly rejected the idea of resistance. Although courageous enough she was no fool and knew that if it ever came to "gun-play" she would stand no chance with her pursuers. She decided that no doubt they had not shot because on getting within revolver range they had discovered that they were in pursuit of a woman, but she doubted that this fact would prevent their promptly returning fire should she once open it.

Another quarter-mile and they raced into the opening of a narrow gully which ran parallel to the high road, from which it was separated by irregular, broken hills. By this time Edith's pony was very tired and not ashamed to show it. The Turkish officer had drawn up almost abreast and a little to the right, and as Edith glanced at him over her shoulder he smiled back, a bit mockingly,

and raised his hand to his Astrakhan fez in salute. With her pretty brows knit in a frown Edith reined in so sharply that the Turk overrode her by several lengths before he was able to check his horse. Then he wheeled, to find his prisoner composedly sitting her badly spent pony, her cheeks flushed, eyes bright and defiant and the golden hair tumbled about her shoulders.

The officer drew rein beside her, trying with considerable effort to conceal his amazement as he surveyed the lovely, thorn-scratched face, the graceful, aristocratic figure and the stylish costume consisting of long coat, divided skirt and trim riding-boots, the heels of which carried tiny spurs of gold.

But manners are first nature to an Ottoman and so, although his dark eyes flashed amusement as he glanced at the little revolver in its holster, he made the graceful Turkish salutation and there was in his air no hint of the captor. It was very evident that the Giaour woman was a lady of high caste, although how she happened to be there was unfathomable, and the Turk had travelled a little in Europe and knew something of the customs of foreigners. Just then the non-com. came labouring up and even the rough soldier, after the first, curious glance, quickly averted his eyes and moved away a short distance, for to him as well as to his chief it was plain that their prisoner was a person of consequence and it is not good Turkish form to look directly at any lady.

Edith gave a little nod in acknowledgment of the officer's salute, then smiled.

"Does monsieur speak French?" she asked, in that tongue.

"Yes, madam—though not as well as I might wish," he answered, with a perfect accent.

"Then permit me to explain my position. I am the Countess von Essingen——"

Again the ready salutation; the hand to the forehead, lips and chest.

"—and a friend," Edith continued, "of Hamdi Pasha."

The officer looked startled.

"My brother and I," Edith continued, "came to Podoni in our yacht intending to accept Hamdi Pasha's invitation to visit him at Suruk, but finding a revolution in progress we accepted the hospitality of the Princess Lilear, at Istria. While there, Hamdi contrived to kidnap our hostess and carried her a prisoner to Karoz. I am now on my way to join her, since Hamdi Pasha has been defeated by the Karamanians under Osborne Pasha, and the hostilities are at an end."

The Turk's jaw fell. "But the hostilities are far from being at an end, madam!" he exclaimed.

"Then they will be very shortly," Edith retorted, "for Osborne Pasha now holds Karoz and General Kostovo is marching from Istria with a full regiment of dragoons. I was riding ahead of this column with General Kostovo when we ran into your out-

post. The general returned to his regiment, while I rode on toward Karoz."

The officer looked very much perplexed.

"How do you know all of this, madam?" he asked. "Myself, I have heard no such news."

"Couriers came yesterday," said Edith, "bringing the news that Osborne Pasha had routed the dervishes, with great loss to them, and a little later had fallen upon Hamdi Pasha's Montenegrin Sepahis and utterly destroyed them. While doing this, with one battalion of the Akindschis, the other battalion, under Colonel Razamachi Bey, obliged the Turkish garrison from Suruk to surrender. So you see, monsieur, the affair is all finished, and if this column of yours is the garrison from Rahut, as General Kostovo seemed to think, I would advise you to march back there as quickly as you can!"

A series of peculiar expressions had followed each other across the face of the Turk; blank amazement, doubt, disbelief and dismay.

"But this cannot be possible, madam!" he said, curtly, when Edith had finished. "We passed through Karoz last night and were ordered by Hamdi Pasha to proceed on the road to Istria. There was no such news as you tell me."

"That is because Osborne Pasha arrived in Karoz after you passed through," Edith answered. "The chances are that Hamdi Pasha is now a prisoner."

The young man gave her a quick glance, then tugged at his black moustache. He was still pon-

dering her words when there came the sound of distant firing. The Turk looked up sharply at Edith.

"General Kostovo's Sepahis," said she, calmly. "Apparently they have come upon your people."

"How strong are they?" asked the Turk, quickly.

"Twelve hundred," answered Edith, without moving a muscle, "and provided with the most modern and efficient arms and ammunition. I am afraid that you will find the Karamanians a hard nut to crack, monsieur. They are born fighters and have been training for months in preparation for this struggle. After what I saw at Istria I advised Hamdi Pasha, as a friend, to give up his undertaking—but he is very ambitious."

The Turk turned to his non-com. and said a few swift words, then addressing himself to Edith:

"It is necessary for me to return at once to my command, madam. I must request you to give your rein to this man—and that you give me——" he smiled, "your weapon."

The angry colour flamed into Edith's face.

"I beg that monsieur will not hinder me from riding on to Karoz!" said she.

"That is impossible, madam——" he began, when there was a sudden interruption.

From close at hand there came the sound of horses hoofs on the hard turf and instinctively the hands of the Turks went to their heavy revolvers. A moment later two horsemen turned the corner of a hill-

ock not fifty feet away and Edith, to her amazement, looked into the startled face of Dick.

"Osborne Pasha!" cried the Turkish officer, and raising his revolver, fired. Dick, who had drawn rein, swayed in his saddle. At the same instant the Turkish non-com. fired on his Akindschi orderly, who promptly unslung his carbine and returned the shot.

But Edith was oblivious to all but Dick himself, who suddenly pitched forward on his horse's neck, then clapping both hands to his heart fell headlong from the saddle to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIV

WITHOUT a thought of her own danger, Edith struck the spurs into her tired horse and the startled animal sprang forward. Carbine and revolvers were barking viciously and the bullets whistling past, and as Edith reached the spot where Dick had fallen there came a cry from behind her and the sound of scampering hoofs. But even then she did not look back, for at her feet lay Dick, both grimy hands gripping at his tunic over the heart and his upturned face a livid grey.

Edith slipped from her pony and knelt at the side of the prostrate man. As she did so she heard at her elbow a gasping: "*chock yasha Karamania!*" and turned for an instant to see the orderly, rocking in his saddle, the blood trickling from between his set teeth. His eyes were fixed and staring and even as Edith looked he lurched sideways in his saddle, then crashed to the ground and lay motionless.

In the distance the two Turks were riding away, the non-com. apparently supporting the officer in his saddle. Edith scarcely gave them a glance, but with a horrid sense of suffocation leaned over Dick and gently drew down his hands. At sight of the bullet hole in his tunic, directly over the heart, a cry broke from her lips and for a moment every-



thing about grew black and indistinct. But even as her eyes rested unseeingly on the wound she was conscious of a motion beneath her hand, which lay upon his chest, and pulling herself together with a supreme effort she discovered that Dick was breathing, actually breathing! The respirations were short, shallow, feeble and uneven, but he was breathing none the less. Moreover, she noticed that about the bullet hole there was not the slightest trace of blood.

He was lying flat upon his back, his eyes closed and his strong teeth showing tightly clenched between his livid, parted lips. Edith laid her hand over his heart and felt something hard and compact beneath the khaki tunic. A quick investigation brought to light a thick pigskin wallet, filled with papers, and of which the outer cover was crushed and torn. Realising in a flash what had happened, Edith turned the wallet in her hand and found that the inner flap was still intact. The bullet, then, must be inside. With trembling fingers she opened the pocket-book and began to take out the papers. Those on the outer side were crushed and ground into shreds, as though someone had placed the end of a walking-stick upon them and twisted it about. There were receipts, a letter or two, some bills, French bank notes of 100 francs each, and at last, between some visiting cards and a small vignette photograph, the bullet itself, half-flattened from the impact.

But what caught Edith's eye was the little portrait and as she held it quickly to the light the blood rushed to her cheeks and a moisture came before her eyes, while her breath was almost stifled, for faded and mutilated as the portrait was, she recognised it as one of herself which she had given to Dick some years before when they were engaged to be married.

Her fingers trembled so that she could scarcely replace the papers in the wallet, which she returned to the inner breast bocket of Dick's tunic. Edith realised that his condition was due entirely to the frightful shock to the heart, caused by the impact of the bullet. Gently exposing his chest she saw that a slight discolouration was beginning to show itself, with a puffiness of the skin and surrounding tissues. Under the gentle pressure of her hand she felt the heart beating feebly and fitfully, while the ashen colour of Dick's face seemed to tell of a mortal hurt.

Not knowing what to do, Edith seated herself at his side and waited for some sign of returning consciousness. A glance at the orderly, lying face downward within a few feet, showed that the poor fellow was quite dead. The Turkish captain was a splendid marksman and had made good practice.

The little swale in which they were was surrounded on all sides by hills of from 100 to 200 feet in height, some rocky and bare, others partly covered by bracken. Of these hills one was considerably higher



than its neighbours and directly on its summit stood a huge beech tree, the leaves a ruddy bronze. Edith surmised that Dick and his orderly had been riding toward this hill with the idea of reconnoitring from its top when they had come upon the Turks and herself. In that case, she reasoned, it was probable that the Akindschis were not far distant, and she decided that her best course would be to climb to the top of one of the hillocks and look about her.

The three horses were standing with hanging heads where they had been left. Edith scrambled to her feet and looked around, and as she did so a jackal slunk out from behind a stone and trotted into the sedge, looking back at her evilly over his shoulder. She shuddered, then glanced at Dick, and for a moment her heart seemed to stop beating as she saw that his face had lost its ashen pallor and wore a more life-like tint. Also, his breathing was growing more pronounced. She laid her hand over his heart and felt its action to be a trifle stronger.

She was staring at him intently when all at once his eyelids fluttered, then raised and the stone-grey eyes looked up fixedly. Edith took one of the strong hands in hers.

"Dick!" she whispered. "Dicky-boy!"

The expression of the grey eyes grew bewildered.

"Edith——" he muttered, all but inaudibly. "What—are you—doing here?"

As he spoke there came from the direction of the

road a few straggling gun-shots. Dick's head turned slightly and he made an effort to raise himself, then fell back with a groan and his face grew livid again.

"Lie still, Dicky——" Edith murmured. "You have been shot over the heart, dear. The wallet stopped the bullet, but your heart has had a very bad shock. Don't try to move just yet."

Dick looked at her wonderingly.

"How the dickens did *you* get here?" he muttered.

In a few rapid words she told him of her ride with Kostovo and of her flight and capture.

"H'mph! Then my messenger failed to get through! What rotten luck—to get laid out just when I had so much to do!"

"You ought to be grateful, Dicky mine! But what is going to happen now?"

"Darned if I know. It's up to Kostovo and my two officers. I'm out of the running for awhile. Feel as if I'd swallowed an alarm clock and it was going off when it felt like it. Hurt's me to bat an eye."

The firing broke out afresh and Dick groaned.

"It's a rotten lay out," said Dick, weakly. "Kostovo with his five hundred herders on plough-horses and no ammunition and about two hundred used-up Akindschis against a battalion of well-armed, well-trained Turks. Then at Karoz a fortress with a strong Turkish garrison and a handful of Akindschis lyin' around outside. If we could only get the



arms and ammunition of the Turks who surrendered yesterday to Kostovo we might give 'em a whirl——! Anyway, we've got Hamdi."

"You have captured Hamdi?" cried Edith.

"Yep. Was just going to order the beggar shot when Kostovo's courier came into camp. The princess is a prisoner in the fortress."

Edith turned away her face. There came a sudden rattle of firing from the other side of the hills which separated them from the road.

"Probably some of my boys," said Dick. "Look here, Edith, couldn't you jump on your pony and ride to the top of that hill and see what's going on? Don't show yourself; just peek over and see what's up."

"Of course, Dicky. Suppose I go to the top of that high hill with the tree on its top; I could see all over from there. Don't try to move, dear. I'll not be gone five minutes!"

Dick nodded and Edith, mounting her pony urged him to the top of the hill. There she found that she could command a view of the valley for miles, and almost immediately she discovered a small body of horsemen on the road toward Istria and about a mile away. A moment later she discovered others moving through the low hills which flanked the road on either side. Far in the distance she heard intermittent rifle-firing and she could see tiny moving figures on the tops of the sand hills where she knew the Turks to be. The Akindschis had halted, and

appeared to be waiting, and Edith surmised that they were expecting their commander to return from his reconnaissance.

Afraid to leave Dick any longer she quickly returned and found him resting quietly, although the expression about his mouth and the dark shadows beneath his eyes told that he was in considerable pain.

"Are you suffering, dear?" asked Edith, gently.

"Hurts a little. What did you see?"

Edith told him in detail while he listened attentively.

"Wonder if I couldn't manage to get up there?" said he. "Then I could keep tabs on things. Besides, the Turks are apt to march back to Karoz, and then I'd be in a bad place here. If I were to be taken the chances are a little more than even that I'd be shot. You see, I'm an outsider."

"You are not going to be taken, Dicky. If it were not that I hated to leave you for so long I would ride up the road and tell the Akindschis that you were here."

"You might do that later—and take a message same time, if I could only get up yonder——" He looked wistfully toward the hill-top.

"How do you feel?" asked Edith.

"Pretty shaky. However, suppose I try——" He raised himself slowly while Edith watched him in deep anxiety.

"Lead my pony over here, Edie—I'm going to



try it. If I get woozy I'll roll off. Gad—but my heart feels like a foot-ball."

Edith led the horse to where he lay. Taking hold of the stirrup and with Edith assisting him, Dick raised himself slowly to his feet, when he stood for a moment, his head hanging. Another and more violent effort found him in the saddle, swaying drunkenly, his face again livid and his breath coming in shallow gasps.

"Dick!" cried Edith, "it is too risky——" She reached up her hands. "You are not strong enough!"

"Yes—I—am——" he panted, and moved off in the direction of the steep slope. Edith, leading her own pony by the head, followed him. Half way up Dick fell forward on his pony's neck and in that position he remained until the summit was reached, when to Edith's unspeakable horror he slid gently to the ground and lapsed into utter unconsciousness. All of the former lividity had returned to his skin while the action of the heart itself was scarcely perceptible.

He had fallen at the foot of the great tree and Edith, seating herself upon the ground, rolled him gently upon his right side, to give the heart as much freedom of action as possible, then leaning her back against the tree-trunk she drew his head into her lap and waited in an agony of dread, for some sign of returning consciousness. The condition proved to be no more than a protracted fainting

spell, for presently the deathlike pallor gave way to a decidedly more normal tint and then his eyes opened.

"Ug'h—fainted again!" said he. "Never mind——" he stared up at the branches over his head. "We're here!"

"How do you feel now?" asked Edith, bending over him.

"Wobbly. There's probably a lot of effusion around the heart—feels that way. Are the Akindschis still there?"

"They've moved on a little in the direction of Istria. Some of them are on top of the sand dunes."

"The thing to do," said Dick, "is for Kostovo to make a detour with his Sepahis and ride to Karoz, leaving the Akindschis here to delay the movements of the Turks as much as possible. At Karoz, Kostovo ought to execute Hamdi, then demand the surrender of the fortress. He would probably get it, and then our position wouldn't be so bad."

"How about Istria?"

"Istria will have to look after itself. Besides, the Turks will undoubtedly fall back on Karoz. No doubt they are mighty puzzled and worried now. Look here, Edie, do you think that you could ride down there and bring back one of my officers?"

"Of course—but I don't like to leave you."

"I'm all right when I keep still. Ride straight for the road and follow it. D'you mind?"



"Of course not, Dick. Promise that you will keep still?"

"I promise."

"But—those nasty kites, Dick! And I saw a jackal, down below."

"I'm not dead yet, by a long shot. Go, Edith; you may be the saving of Karamania!"

"Karamania be hanged! But I'll go for your sake, Dicky."

"Thanks, little girl."

Edith leaned suddenly down and her lips brushed Dick's forehead. Gently disengaging his head she placed his hat beneath it, letting it rest on a natural pillow of turf between the spreading roots of the tree. Leading her pony to a stone she mounted, and from the saddle turned and blew him a little kiss, then rode over the brink of the hill and disappeared. A moment later she came in sight again on the road, her pony at a swift gallop. With an effort which cost him considerable distress, Dick got out his field-glasses and followed her course. He saw her reach the Akindschis, who immediately clustered about her to presently give way, when she emerged with a horseman by her side and both galloped rapidly in his direction. A few minutes later his newly appointed major appeared over the brow of the hill, dismounted and came toward him with a salute.

"You are badly hurt, Osborne Pasha?" he cried, in consternation.

"I am *hors-de-combat*," said Dick, and explained in a few words the nature of his hurt. He then scribbled a short note to General Kostovo, to be sent by an Akindschi courier and outlined to the officer the plan of campaign.

"We will do our best, Osborne Pasha," said the major. "As soon as the Turks have passed, I will send men with a stretcher to get you. Meantime, I think that you are safe here. It is not probable that the enemy will leave the road. Here is my canteen. And now I will go, for there appears to be some movement over yonder."

When he had gone, Dick handed his field-glasses to Edith.

"Take a look every now and then and tell me what is going on."

Edith took the glasses and swept the surrounding country. Far to the southeast one could now see the small, white dots against the dull background of brownish green; the outlying abodes of Karoz in their surrounding olive orchards. To the north were the forested slopes leading to Istria, the immediate location of which was hidden by an intervening mountain. No moving object was in sight, and Edith lowered the glasses to look for the Akindschis, toward whom the officer was now riding rapidly. As Edith watched he reached his troop which a moment later was broken up into squads of four and six which promptly wheeled and disappeared between the sand hillocks. Presently, there

appeared numerous small black objects crawling insect-like up the sides of the dunes which bordered the road.

Edith reported what she had seen.

"Good," said Dick. "That means that the Turks have started back to Karoz. The Akindschis will hang on and off and snipe them as they get the chance, falling back as they advance. Now if Kostovo can only manage to ride around and head them off, they'll be awfully upset!"

"How feeling, Dicky?"

"Sleepy."

"Put your head on my lap and take a snooze."

"Too heavy for you——"

"Nonsense!" She resumed her former position against the tree-trunk. "Goodness, how dirty you are, Dick! There—now go by-by like a good little boy. Comfy?"

"Bully."

"Then go to sleep."

She laid down the glass and ran her fingers lightly through his hair, which was a chestnut colour, inclined to curl and at the present moment filled with dust. Dick gave a contented sigh and was almost immediately asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

EDITH, her heart full to the bursting point, sat motionless, looking down with brimming eyes on the haggard, battle-worn face. With one hand she continued her gentle, caressing touch; with the other she occasionally raised the glasses to her eyes. Twenty minutes passed with no sign of activity from up the road; then the faint breeze brought to her ears a number of faint reports.

Dick slept peacefully as a tired child. Edith, glancing at him anxiously, saw that his skin had regained its normal colour with a slightly added flush, while his breathing was slow and regular. Her eyes examined the many stains of battle to which the khaki uniform gave abundant evidence, then rested on the strong features, now robbed of their habitual stern expression and relaxed and boyish. "What a *man!*" she whispered to herself, and with a rush of almost overpowering emotion, "and he is mine! *mine!*" She bent lower and brushed the crisp hair with her lips. "No savage of a Karamanian shall ever get you away from me, Dicky!" she murmured under her breath. "No, not if I have to poison her! You belong to me, darling, and I shall show you what life really means—and myself as well!"



She was roused from her reverie by the sound of firing close at hand and snatching up the glasses discovered that the Akindschis on the hillocks were in action. A moment later her eye was caught by something moving across the broken ground far to the eastward and fixing it with the glasses she distinguished a column of cavalry in rapid motion.

"There go the Sepahis——" she thought, and wondered if she should rouse Dick. The cavalry disappeared behind a ridge and she looked back toward the Akindschis. They had ceased firing but were still occupying the same position. Edith was watching them closely when she felt Dick stir and glancing down saw that his eyes were open and looking up at her with a peculiar expression in their cold, grey depths.

She bent over him and smiled.

"Feeling better, dear?"

"A whole lot. How long have I been asleep?"

"Nearly an hour."

"Anything happened?"

"The Sepahis have ridden around on their way to Istria. Poor Hamdi! What a piece of adamant you are, Dick. Have you no soft fibre in you?"

"Not for that beast. First he sets a mob of filthy dervishes on us, then takes to woman stealin'. It's time he was fed a bullet."

He tried to sit upright, then clapped his hand to his chest and grew very pale. Edith drew him gently back.

"Keep still, Dick."

"Gad, but I'm sore. Still, I believe that I could ride——"

"I believe you will not! You know what happened when you rode up here! One of these times you may not come back again! No, sir, here you are and here you stop until your Akindschis come after you with a stretcher."

Dick glanced up at the pretty, resolute face and grinned.

"You appear to be running the whole show, Edie; too bad you're not a man."

"You didn't use to think so, my little friend."

Dick's eyes narrowed. Edith looked down at him and there was a teasing smile on her lovely mouth while her violet eyes were misty. Leaning suddenly lower she kissed him lightly and caressingly on the eyebrow.

"And you will not think so, many days from this, Dicky-bird." She gave her head a little nod. "You were meant for me from the start, and I mean to have you. No use squirming, my little boy; you can't get away!"

"I can't just now, and that's a fact!"

"You can't at any time—and you never could. As a matter of fact deep down in your heart you never really wanted to!"

Without pretending to any psychological training, Edith fully understood the value of potent suggestion.



"What makes you think that?" growled Dick.

"Because, my dear, if you had, you would not have resigned your commission in the army, so as to be free to go where I was at any time, or to take the field nearer to me."

"Ho! Think that, do you," grunted Dick, but his colour had grown slightly deeper.

"Yes, Dicky. Neither would you be carrying my portrait around in your pocket-book!"

"H'mph! Been snooping, have you?"

"Yes—trying to see what became of that bullet. It was my face that stopped it, Dicky! I have heard of women whose faces stopped clocks—but I never heard of one whose face could stop a bullet. Kept it from going into your heart, little boy! Some day it will be so full of the original that not even a bullet could get in. But don't you see the lesson in this? Haven't your Oriental affiliations taught you anything about *kismet?* My image is going to keep everyone else out of your heart, Dicky-boy, because I mean to live there myself!"

Dick grinned maliciously, looking more like a mischievous boy than a blood-stained Mars being wooed by Venus.

"Suppose the flat is already let? What then?"

"Then the other tenant will have to move out—or I will move her!"

"S'ppose she won't go?"

"She'll have to go!" cried Edith fiercely, "or I'll set the place on fire!"

"Huh!—you used to do that pretty often, once upon a time, 'til I got it fire-proofed!"

Edith leaned over and took both of his big-boned wrists in her small, strong hands. The colour had come into her face and her eyes looked as if about to pour out a flood of tears.

"Oh, Dick—Dick—why do you torment me so?" The rich voice held a throaty quaver. "Don't you know that people like you and myself never really love but once? You are a soldier, Dick, and you carry the idea of discipline into your very inmost emotions. I was disobedient, insubordinate, mutinous—whatever you like to call it, so you court-martialled me and drummed me out of your camp."

"Shucks—you deserted."

"I did not! I thought that I could hold two fortresses; one man's name and another man's love. The count understood perfectly. He knew from the first that all he could ever expect from me was my money! I told him that I loved another man and meant to have him. I thought that you would understand, Dick."

"So I did."

"Well—then I thought that you loved me too much to give me up merely because I—I——"

"Married another man?" Dick's voice was mocking. "But there! you knew that I was awfully finnicky about some things!"

Edith laughed with the corners of her mouth drawn down. Dick grinned up at her cheerfully.



"You are hopeless, Dick—or at least you would be so to a woman who had much vanity. I haven't any—nor pride, where you are concerned. I don't think that I've got much of anything but feelings and a whole lot of love. I am not a good soldier, Dicky; I can fight like the devil, but only for what I want."

"You can fight for that all right!"

"You don't know yourself how hard, little boy. Right to a finish—and there's nothing particularly Marquis o' Queensbury about my rules, either. A gun, a knife, the bung-starter—or any old bottle off the bar——!" Her rich laugh rippled out. "The weapons all look alike to me, Dicky, when I start after my prey!"

Dick laughed, then gripped his chest while his colour suddenly faded.

"Keep quiet, dear," said Edith, and her light, bantering tone had suddenly become that of a mother leaning over the crib of a sick child. The expression of the lovely, vital face was maternal also, the forehead seamed by the tenderest of anxious lines, the violet eyes soft and humid and the sweet mouth pursed into that expression which one associates with a soothing tone. Dick stared up at her with a sort of wonder in his steely eyes.

"Edie," said he, slowly, "are you an angel, or a sort of female devil?"

"Both, Dicky-mine. I was born with lots of heaven and hell in me. The heaven is all for you,

and the hell for anybody who tries to come between us."

"You did not seem inclined to give the princess hell!"

"I have, Dick. She threatened to take you away from me, so I made a plot with Hamdi to have him abduct her."

"*What!*" Dick made a sudden motion to rise, then sank back, pale and breathless. His face grew suddenly livid and a rime of perspiration stood out upon his white forehead.

"Steady, Dick——" Edith's tone was almost that of a sportsman admonishing his setters. "Wait until I give you all of the facts. It appeared that your cause, the Karamanian cause, was hopeless. The sheiks were insisting upon a fight and you wanted to wait, because you did not see any chance of success. But they would not have waited Dick, and I was afraid that if you fought you would be killed. Hamdi said that the whole movement would be nipped in the bud if he could get the custody of the princess, so on his promise that no harm should happen her, and he swore on his honour, I agreed to help him. He accomplished it—and I must say, he did it rather thoroughly!" She made a wry face and rubbed her round, supple arms. "For a few moments I thought that I had run *my* head into a bag and was destined to be sold in the slave mart. How much do you think that I would bring, Dicky?"



She laughed. "Or, it occurred to me, I might land in the hareemlick of Hamdi himself!"

"And a darn good place for you, too!"

"Maybe, Dicky-bird. But it would not have been good for Hamdi!" Her teeth came together with a vicious little click. "I'm not an Oriental woman, Dicky, I'm American—and I would have made Hamdi think that he had rounded up a concentrated essence of the Fourth of July!"

Dick stared up at her for a moment; then the hard look in his eyes softened and he smiled.

"When you stop playing the ends against the middle, Edie, you may begin to accomplish something! You always persist in biting off more than you can chaw!"

"Then I gulp it down, my dear. When I begin to accomplish things it is usually for the benefit of somebody else. So far, I haven't attained the state of grace to make that my life's effort. I am playing this game for the man whom I love and myself!"

"For yourself—and the man that you love!" Dick amended.

"No, my little boy. First and foremost I wanted to keep you from being killed. I don't want you to fight—except for me. But here it is not even as though you were fighting for a Cause. You are fighting for a little tin pot of an unfledged Balkan principality—and you are doing it, or at least you started in to do it, for money! It was merely a

professional engagement. But also, I wanted to save a lot of unnecessary bloodshed and massacre that was bound to ensue if you took the field. Really, Dick, when all is said and done you are merely a paid fighter—a mercenary—and that is not good enough to get killed for. At least, it is not good enough for me to stand pat and see you get killed for, if there is anything that I can do to prevent it, Dicky-mine!"

Dick did not answer. In fact, there did not seem to be very much for him to say. Edith picked up the glasses and began to study the Akindschi, still lying in the same position on the hillocks. Far down the valley the Sepahis had struck into the high-road and their position was marked by a swirling cloud of dust.

"So you see, my friend," Edith continued, the glasses still held to her eyes, "there is a *pro* as well as a *con* to my treachery. After all, supposing that the princess was my hostess I do not see that there was any great obligation entailed on my part. Jim was shot all to pieces in her defence and I had a bit of a whirl myself—on the top of my head in the sand! In fact, as I saw it, she was appropriating the whole crowd of us for her own ends, all of which I might have overlooked if she had not tried to steal *you!*"

"Nonsense—she never did anything of the sort."

"She meant to—the cat!"

"She meant to beat my head in with a stick!"



"That's just it! She whacked you with a stick and she waited to see you get killed—and that certainly shows a sufficiently strong personal interest. All that I did was to shoot a brigand and run the gauntlet of a Turkish outpost—did you see where my pony was creased across the withers?—and act as your courier and sit here for an hour with your head on my lap and the ants running up and down my neck, and I loathe ants! It's just the difference between the savage and the civilised methods. Pretty soon, when I've turned you over to your Akindschis, I'm going to get hold of a carbine and take a stack in the game myself!"

"You think so, do you?"

"Yes. I'm going to ride over to Karoz and tell Kostovo to offer Hamdi in exchange for the princess." She picked up the glasses again.

"Yes? And what then?" Dick's voice was ironical.

"Then I'm going to bring your princess to you and give you my benediction. When I come to round up my wrongs I find that I am getting a little jaded with you both."

"And after you've done this?"

"After that, as soon as Jim is fit for the trail, we will go back to Paris and I will fill my life with other interests, Dicky dear. There are plenty who will be glad to help the good work along. At the end of a few weeks you will probably have had enough of your princess and feel the need of your

own species again. You will want to return to your first love—your only love, because people like ourselves never really love but once, as I said a little while ago. Then, if I am free, we might yet be happy. If not——" Edith shrugged.

For a moment Dick was silent; then he said in a somewhat sulky voice:

"Well—if not——?"

"Then I suppose you will slam off and arrange for the slaughter of a few more people at so much per head—while I——" She paused.

"Well—while you—*what?*" Dick raised himself cautiously and stared at her with a wrathful face. "Look here, this is all nice and consistent with what you were saying a little while ago about being determined to—to——" he paused, flushed, angry and embarrassed.

Edith looked at him with her most ravishing smile. "About getting you at any cost, do you mean, Dicky? But then, my dear, women are never consistent; when they are, they are no longer womanly. Besides, I am not sure but that it might be a good plan after all for you to have your princess first."

"*What!*" cried Dick, actually scandalised.

"Just that, little boy. Perhaps you had better have her first."

"*First!*"

"Yes—why not——?" Edith's violet eyes were limpid as the Aegean. "I understand men, Dicky-bird. If I were to take you away from her now

there would always be that lingering sentiment and the feeling that perhaps you had made a great mistake—that you had been lured away from the real thing. On the whole, I think that you had better have her—for as long as you like, which will not be so many weeks. You will come back to me in the end. Then, if I still feel the same—or if I am free to bring it about—you will learn what true happiness really is!" She bent over and looked at him with deep, glowing eyes. "But first, little boy, you had better lick the paint off your new toy and see what's underneath. It will be Oriental, and you will not like it as well as you do the outside—and will want to come back to Edith. And oh, my dear—I *hope* that I will be free then, because——" she stooped suddenly, threw her arms about his neck and crushed the grimy face to hers; "—because I love you! love you! love you!" she whispered in his ear, and he felt the tears from her brimming eyes upon his cheek.

Suddenly she loosed him and sat up, snatching at the glasses. The sound of rapid firing was wafted down to them on the breeze.

"Look, Dick—the Akindschis are firing—now they are running down to their horses. Did you see that red flash? Here come the Turks!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Dick slowly raised himself and took the glasses from her hands. His own trembled a little and his face was very white.

Sure enough, the Akindschis were falling back before the advance of the Turkish column. The latter had thrown out a skirmish line on either side of the road and well ahead of the first company. The two watching from the hill-top could see that the skirmish line reached well out amongst the sand hills, and as it advanced the Akindschis would fire, then retreat to take up new positions on ahead. Some distance behind the skirmishers came the main column, marching in column of fours, and they could see the *flash-flash—flash-flash* of the bright sun on their arms and accoutrements as they swung smartly along. The Turks were conducting their retreat rapidly and in good order.

"My Akindschis are dong the right thing," said Dick, laying down the glasses, "but it doesn't seem to be very effective. I want to delay the Turks as much as possible to give Kostovo time to work out his plans, or at least to organise for the defence of Karoz. But my Akindschi officer knows that we can't afford to lose any more men, so he's keeping them on the jump and not taking chances—and to

think that at this time yesterday we had about a thousand of them!" His face grew sombre.

"And how many have you now?"

"Not three hundred, counting in the prison guard and all——"

"What!" Edith's eyes grew wide with horror. "Do you mean to say that you have lost *seven hundred!*"

"Killed and wounded. Mostly killed. You see, two troops lost their heads in the fight with the dervishes and were practically wiped out; then the fight with the Montenegrins took nearly half of what was left, and last night Razamachi rode into a trap at the fortress in Karoz. The Akindschis have certainly suffered a lot."

Edith looked at him with glowing eyes. "What a day!" she murmured.

"Busiest ever *I* spent! The fight with the Montenegrins was mostly steel. Then I managed to get the Akindschis to use their guns, and that pulled us through. Both outfits had rather fight than eat, so long as they can fight each other! Look here, Edie, I don't think so much of our position here on the top of this hill. Everything seems to be coming our way!"

"I was thinking the same thing," answered Edith, knitting her straight brows. "Look, there go some of the Akindschis up that hill in front of us."

Not five hundred yards distant a dozen of the Akindschi troopers were swarming up the steep slope

of a low hillock, their ponies humping their bodies like rabbits. As Dick and Edith watched, the men reached the top, threw themselves on the ground, and crawling on their faces to the edge of the hill, opened a brisk fire with their carbines. For perhaps ten minutes they continued to occupy their position, then leaping to their feet they remounted and came pouring down the hillside. At the same moment the line of Turkish skirmishers appeared, running as if to cut them off from the road. Standing in their stirrups the troopers began to fire, almost at right angles to the road; a horse stumbled and fell, struggled for a moment to regain its feet, then floundered to earth and lay still. The rider, rolling over in the sand, was on his feet like a flash, whipped up his carbine from where it had fallen and catching the stirrup-leather of a comrade, ran at the horse's side. The two made for the road, but the rest of the squad rode straight for the base of the hill on the summit of which were Dick and Edith.

"If they are coming for me," said Dick, calmly, "they have waited too long. The Turks will be abreast of this place before they could get me down."

"Here they come!" cried Edith.

There was a thudding of hoofs on the hard turf and the troopers came surging up over the edge of the slope. At sight of Dick the umbashi in command uttered a cry of dismay.

"Osborne Pasha! *Mash Allah!* I heard that you were killed!"

"I am wounded," said Dick, "and unable to ride. Fire a few shots and then go, for if the enemy come up here it will be all over with me."

The troopers had swung from their saddles and leaving one man to hold the horses the rest dropped on their faces and opened a hot fire on the Turkish skirmishers below. At once there came an answering fire and the bullets began to sing and whistle over their heads.

"We had better retreat, Osborne Pasha," said the umbashi. "If we go now they will hold on after us. You are unable to ride?"

Dick pulled open the bosom of his shirt and exposed a livid and swollen bruise over his heart.

"The bullet was stopped by the papers in my wallet," he said, "but if I try to move, my heart stops its work."

The umbashi nodded. "You must not move," said he. "I have seen such wounds. My brother was once kicked by a mare, over the heart, and it was a month before he could move without losing consciousness. You will be safe here, Osborne Pasha. I will withdraw my men, when the Turks will march past. Do you keep hidden until the column has disappeared and then signal to some of our men who have ridden around and are hanging on their heels."

"Good! Then you are behind them, also!"

"Yes, Osborne Pasha. Half of the Akindschis are trying to hold back the advance, while the other half has ridden around and is keeping their rear guard occupied. They have lost a number of men already."

"That is well executed. It is probable that by the time that he reaches Karoz, Achmet Pasha will have formed a different idea of the campaign."

A trooper turned and called over his shoulder:

"Umbashi, here comes the main column!"

"We must be off," said the umbashi. "My orders are to engage only the skirmishers. Osborne Pasha, I will withdraw my men in plain sight of the enemy, so as to draw them after us."

"Good," said Dick. "Go, then. My compliments to the major and tell him that I am much pleased with his manœuvres."

The umbashi saluted, then gave an order. The men scrambled to their feet, mounted and rode down the side of the hill which faced the highway. A scattering fire from the Turks passed over their heads, but the range was long and there were no casualties.

"Keep under cover," said Dick, to Edith. "Don't let them catch a glimpse of you or we're gone!"

Edith dropped on the sod beside him. Her eyes were deep and glowing and her breath was coming quickly.

"Dicky, I believe that I like war. I am beginning to understand why you turned——"



"Mercenary? That was to be near you, of course."

"Call it 'Soldier of Fortune.' It sounds more romantic. And I'm afraid it wasn't altogether to be near me, after all; it was because you like to fight. Never mind, Dicky; we'll have a row once in a while, just to keep you from getting stale!"

For several minutes they waited in silence, while from beneath came the sound of scattering shots, some growing fainter, others gradually more distinct. Presently Edith raised her head to peep below.

"The Akindschis are mighty nasty about giving up that next rise in the ground—hello, there's a horse down!"

"Rider hurt?"

"He is—yes—in the leg, I think. Another man has dismounted and put him on his horse, and is running at the side. I love the Akindschis, Dick!"

"So do I. Kostovo was right; there's been nothing like them since the cavalry of Alexander the Great. Horses and men—they're all of a piece." His face grew thoughtful. "If one could only recruit about five regiments of 'em for the big fight—when the Powers get busy here on the Peninsula! These chaps would make even the Italian cavalry look like a girl's riding school! What a picnic!"

"You are a killer, Dick."

"No, a fighter. There's a difference."

"Wish you were a lover, instead."

"Well, I'm not!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Then you will be some day. The material is there; all it wants is developing."

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you kissed me in the garden at Istria." She threw him her naughtiest look. "When you get well you shall kiss me like that again. But you mustn't try it now; it's too much of a strain on the heart!"

"It's a strain on the mo-rils!" said Dick, with a grin.

"But didn't you like it?"

"No. It wakens impulses of the stone-age. We ought to go ahead in our evolution, not backward."

"H'mph! Just the same you relished that fight with the steel yesterday; come, didn't you?"

"That is different."

"Not one bit! Old Kostovo was right. Show me a fighter and I'll show you a good lover. The brawler is the disgusting lover—the sort that wants to maul you about."

"How about the boudoir-knight?"

"They are not lovers. Pah! That sort make me sick! They are the sort that old Ulysses cleared out when he came back——"

"Warm from Circe's arms!"

"Never mind. Circe couldn't change *him* into a swine, and why? Because he was a real fighting-



man. There is a great difference, my dear, between the sensualist and the feminist."

"Is there?" Dick looked bored. "Suppose you take another look over the edge of the hill and see what's going on."

Edith obeyed. "The Turks are swinging along the road. There doesn't seem to be any firing. The Turks are carrying a lot of funny-looking things——"

"Stretchers?"

"Oh, Dick—is that what they are! But there are so many of them——"

"The Akindschis are good shots."

"I'm not so sure that I like this war game, after all."

"It pays its price—just like love," said Dick. "The only difference is that war is done on a cash and love on a credit basis."

"That's almost an epigram."

"No, it's the truth. There's a big difference. A truth is a truth, while an epigram is only what the person who makes it thinks to be the truth."

"Here comes the main column. Lie low, Dicky. They have halted!"

"Wonder why they halted here?"

Edith was peering intently through a little clump of bracken. She turned to Dick a very white and frightened face.

"Oh, Dick! Dick! There are an officer and two men riding this way!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE Turkish battalion, formerly the garrison at Rahut until perverted by the intriguing of Hamdi Pasha, was an exceedingly efficient fighting unit. Well equipped, well trained, well officered and the men natural-born soldiers, like most of the provincial Turks, it was a very different problem from the disaffected garrison at Suruk, whereof the men were poorly fed, clothed and equipped, and, thanks to the dishonesty of their officers, very much in arrears of pay. The garrison from Rahut was recruited principally from men living along the Albanian border; mountaineers and warriors who from time immemorial had waged warfare on their own account with their neighbours, the wild "shkipetari," the Montenegrins and the Serbs.

In a week's march they could outdistance cavalry, and for provender a handful of olives, an onion and a little maize ground in their strong teeth composed a full and opulent repast. Moreover, they were fanatical Mohammedans and hated their unbelieving neighbours with all of the fervour inspired by the faith of Islam. Hamdi Pasha had secured a valuable ally in this battalion. He had hesitated at first about combining with a faction which he might have some difficulty in controlling afterwards, but at the

eleventh hour he had sent messages which had brought Achmet Bey to his support. This had been less difficult through Achmet Bey belonging like Hamdi to the Young Turkish Party, whom Hamdi promised to support a little later when the plans for revolution should have been perfected.

On the arrival of the battalion at Karoz the evening before he had informed Achmet Pasha that the campaign was practically over and had ordered him to march upon and occupy Istria, there to await further instructions.

So when the column found itself confronted with what appeared to be a formidable regiment of cavalry, Kostovo's Sepahis, Achmet Bey was most disagreeably surprised. When, shortly afterwards, the Akindschi attacked the other end of his column, this surprise ripened into first disgust and then suspicion, and he determined to fall back upon Karoz to learn the reason of this unlooked for check. This he was doing rapidly and in good order, although considerably harassed by the Akindschi skirmishers who were taking a vigorous toll out of his retreating column and, thanks to their flying tactics, suffering themselves but very slight loss.

Dick, from his point of observation on the hill-top, had guessed at what must be passing in the mind of the Turkish commander, and had been chuckling to himself when Edith announced breathlessly that a party of the Turks were riding in their direction. It had occurred to Achmet Bey that the

summit of the hill might offer a favourable spot from which to reconnoitre the enemy, and accordingly with one of his captains and an orderly he started the ascent, meanwhile halting the column.

Just at the point where he had chosen to ascend, the brow of the hill completely hid him from the two upon the top, and the first sight which Dick and Edith had of the three after their leaving the road was when they suddenly appeared not fifty feet distant.

"Achmet Bey himself!" growled Dick. "He's an old acquaintance. Edie—we're nailed!"

At the same instant the colonel recognised Dick. Edith had sprung to her feet and was standing tense, alert, dangerous-looking, with the sinuous grace of a leopardess defending her wounded mate.

Ten paces from them Achmet reined in his horse, a superb Arab.

"*Mash Allah!*" he cried. "Osborne Pasha!"

Dick saluted him from where he lay, his back partly propped against the trunk of the tree.

"At your service, Colonel Achmet Bey," he answered. "You will excuse me for not rising; I am somewhat badly hurt. Your captain is an excellent shot, and only that his bullet was stopped by my pocket-book I would not be talking to you now. As it is, the action of my heart is too enfeebled to permit of any effort."

The Turk dismounted, threw the reins to his orderly and came forward on foot. Pausing in front

of Edith he made the graceful Turkish salutation, to which she responded by a slight bow.

"The Countess von Essingen, Colonel Achmet Bey," said Dick. "Madam," he added to Achmet, "is a personal friend of Hamdi Pasha. She and her brother came in their yacht to visit him, but owing to the disturbed condition of affairs, thought it safer to stop at Istria."

Again Achmet bowed, then turned to Dick.

"But this is most distressing, my dear Osborne Pasha," he said, courteously, speaking in French that Edith might be included in the discussion. "To think that when last we met we should have been comrades in arms, hunting those rascally brigands! And now——" he paused, with an expression of real perplexity upon his handsome face.

Dick smiled. "*Eh bien*," said he, "and now?"

Achmet Bey looked much distressed. "The truth is, Osborne Pasha," said he, in Turkish, "my orders from Hamdi Pasha are to have you shot, should you be so unfortunate as to fall into my hands. I have prayed to Allah to be spared such a misfortune."

Dick smiled again. "I think, Achmet Bey," he replied, "that such a course would be exceedingly ill-advised. It so happens that Hamdi Pasha himself is a prisoner in the custody of my Akindschis. If they were to learn that I had been executed, Hamdi would be torn limb from limb!"

The Turk nodded while his eyes wore a veiled look.

"I am not lying," said Dick, curtly. "Of course we are on opposite sides of the trench, but I would strongly advise you to first learn the truth of the matter before taking any immediate steps."

"Will you give me your parole, Osborne Pasha?"

"It is not necessary. I can neither stand nor ride. Do you think I would be lying here if able to get away?"

He turned open his shirt and showed the bruise, which by this time had assumed something the size and shape of a large, ripe fig, of a bluish purple and raised a finger's breadth from the surrounding tissue.

"Allah!" cried the colonel, "but you have had a wonderful escape!"

"It would be discouraging," said Dick, with a smile, "if my life were to be so miraculously preserved in the morning, only to be forfeit at the hands of my old comrade, Achmet Bey, at night."

"My dear Osborne Pasha," said the Turk, "let us hope that we may yet be able to avert such a catastrophe. For the present, however, I shall be compelled to place you under arrest. I will send men here with stretchers and have you carried back to Karoz with us." He turned to Edith and continued in French. "As for Madam la Comtesse, I will request that she accompany us to Karoz, also."

Edith shrugged. "It is very droll," said she. "I come with my brother to visit Hamdi Pasha, who is an old friend, and find myself fighting against

him! But Osborne Pasha is an old friend also, and I trust, Colonel Achmet Bey, that everything will be done for his comfort, even though he is a prisoner."

Achmet Bey bowed. "Madam need have no fear," said he. "After all, this is a somewhat ridiculous state of affairs. Let us hope that the situation may speedily clear."

From the Turkish rear-guard there came the sound of desultory firing. Excusing himself, for the Turk, like the Frenchman, never forgets his manners, Achmet Bey unslung his glass and studied the surrounding country. Edith looked at Dick, who smiled rather wearily.

"What next, Dicky?"

"Allah, he knows! It's an awful mess."

"You seem to have fallen into the hands of a friend."

"He was one of my lieutenants when we were brigand hunting for Abd-ul-Hamid. Now he seems to be out on his own. You can never tell which way a Turk is going to jump."

"But surely he would never order you to be shot!"

"He might, if it seemed worth while. That is the way of warfare in the Balkans. But it would be done most politiely. However, as long as we have got Hamdi by the heels I guess I'm safe enough. Hope the Akindschis haven't got cross and strangled him! However, I fancy that our side is bucking

up a little. Kostovo has probably taken Karoz in hand and when our friend Achmet arrives he may find himself on the wrong side of a trench and be disposed to march on home!"

Edith's eyes sparkled. "I believe I like war after all, Dicky. Poor old Jim! How he would love this —and how glad I am that he got shot up and is out of danger!"

"It's a good job," Dick assented. "These people always shoot over or under, when they miss; they couldn't have helped getting Jim!"

"What do you suppose they will do with *me*?" Edith asked, indifferently.

"Nothing. Achmet is probably keeping you merely for your own safety. True to your usual methods, you have friends in both camps."

"That's not nice, Dicky. As far as I can make out I have no friends in either. Hamdi's a prisoner."

"You've got me."

"You are a prisoner in the other camp. Besides, I don't want you—as a friend!"

"Then why don't you make friends with Achmet?"

"I think that I shall—for your sake. It's rather rough, Dick, when I have tried so hard to—to——"

"There, there, little girl, I'm sorry. It'll all come out right enough. The chances are that Achmet will quit in disgust when he finds that Hamdi is out of the running. Here comes the stretcher—

my word, but the Akindschi *are* taking tea with the rear guard!"

The sound of firing from the rear was getting more and more active. Dick swept the hills beneath with his glasses, but at this point there arrived two sturdy Turks with a stretcher, upon which Dick was carefully placed. Edith mounted her pony, when Dick's horse was taken in charge by an orderly and they started down the steep hillside.

There were by this time a good many Turkish wounded and Dick's stretcher bearers fell in with the others, Edith riding by his side. After the first quick, curious glance the soldiers utterly ignored her presence, but she heard the words: "Osborne Pasha—Osborne Pasha——" followed by the curious little "*tchk—tchk—tchk*——" passing from mouth to mouth, and observed that there was a general craning of necks for a glimpse of the man whose name had been a terror to brigands in the country from which the greater part of the regiment was recruited. Indeed, many of the men present had served under Dick in previous campaigns of a somewhat irregular character.

Presently the firing in the rear ceased, to break out again at the head of the column. Not long afterward that also was discontinued.

"The Akindschis have probably pulled out for Karoz to concentrate with the rest of our crowd," said Dick to Edith.

A little later they halted at a village, when Ach-

met Bey sent the best food to be had to Dick and Edith. After an hour's rest they were off again, swinging along at the rapid marching gait peculiar to the Turks. Lulled by the swing of the stretcher, Dick presently fell asleep while Edith rode on in silence, meditating on the singularity of the position in which the last week had placed her, and wondering at the possible outcome of it all.

Late in the afternoon, as she was getting rather nervous and depressed, Dick suddenly awoke.

"Good Lord——!" he cried, glancing at the sun which was very low. "Have I been asleep all this time?"

"How do you feel?" asked Edith.

"All right—except that my heart feels like a big bubble. There's probably a lot of effusion around it."

"Do you think that it is permanently injured, Dick?"

"Oh, no. Why shouldn't the heart stand a whack, just like any other part of the body? So long as it keeps pumping, I guess it will pull out all right."

"You're a tough pup, Dick!"

"Wouldn't be here now if I wasn't. I've had some pretty hard bumps. Lucky we struck Achmet Bey; another johnnie might have left me on the hill-top for the kites."

"How about me?"

"Nothing bad would have happened to you.



People in the West don't believe it, but a woman could travel all over Turkey safely enough. The season's always closed on 'em. That's what makes Hamdi's play so rotten."

"What do you think is going to happen now?"

"It's hard to say. This outfit is a good little fightin' unit, but it's all adrift; no base, no coöperation, it's all on its own. When we get near Karoz we'll probably run on Kostovo's trenches and find the Sepahis pottin' at us with Turkish Mausers."

"What makes you think so?"

"It's the obvious thing."

But the column did not march on to Karoz that day. Some hours before sunset it occupied a small village, where a cottage was put at the disposal of Dick and Edith and an orderly detailed as guard and servant. When the proprietor and his wife had somewhat recovered from their fright, Edith made friends with the woman and a few small pieces of silver resulted in a very excellent supper.

The day following found Dick's condition practically unchanged. The surface swelling was even more ominous in appearance and the slightest effort resulted in violent pain and faintness.

Much to the surprise of Dick, midday passed and still the Turks sat idly about the little hamlet, smoking and chatting peaceably with the inhabitants, who were Mohammedans and Christians of the Greek Church, but all apparently on good terms.

As a matter of fact it is chiefly between the Christians of the Greek and Bulgarian churches that rancour obtains, far more than between Christian and Moslem. Family feuds are always the most bitter.

At sunset it was evident that some news had been received, for there was a stir in the camp and soon the bugles began to sound the "assembly" and the soldiers to fall in, armed and accoutred for the march.

"This is a queer game," said Dick, as the orderly led out Edith's pony. "Is Achmet planning a night attack, or what?"

Karoz lay but a few miles distant and as they neared the town the mystery deepened. No sound of gunshot came from the head of the column, nor was there any sign that Akindschis or Sepahis existed. It was a dark night, but clear, and as his stretcher swayed evenly along Dick suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Look there——!" said he.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Edith, who was riding at his side and rather enjoying the weird tension of the situation.

"See those dark streaks? they are trenches—and not a man in 'em! What the deuce has happened?"

"Don't worry. We will probably find them all at once. Glad we are well in the rear!"

"But I don't savvy it one bit! Here's where this



outfit ought to be checked, not in the town. The houses are beginning already!"

They swung rapidly onward and were soon marching down one of the main avenues of Karoz. A city of the dead it looked, the houses ghostly and silent, barred, shuttered and unlighted. The street lamps alone were burning and this gave to the place an even greater sense of desolation, not a soul being on the streets. Even the dogs, in which the place was unusally rich, were hushed and hidden.

As the column bore rapidly on, the military boots clattering over the marble slabs with which the city was paved, Dick's mystification increased. What had become of the Karamanians? And even if they had withdrawn, as seemed incredible, and left the place to the Turks, why should it be so hushed and cowering? Hardened campaigner that he was, a sense of black foreboding oppressed him.

"There's a trap going to be sprung pretty soon, or I'm a dog!" he growled to Edith. "I only hope that *you* don't fall within the zone of fire, my dear."

He glanced uneasily at the drab, inscrutable façades of the houses on either side of the street. "For all we know these houses may be cram full of our men, waiting to pot this outfit between the shutters."

But apparently no such fears were entertained by Achmet Bey, for the column swung boldly down the abandoned avenue, crossed the Plaza, marched past the Grand Hôtel du Cheval d'Or, usually so gay

and noisy, but now as silent and shuttered as the rest, then taking a street which led off at an angle they were soon out on the other side of the town and breasting the slope to the old Frankish fortress which overlooked the river.

"This beats me!" said Dick. "Here we go now up to the fortress that I left my men riding herd of. We will march right in, I suppose, and find a cold lunch laid out and Hamdi graciously liberated to pour the wine!"

The first part of this ironic prophecy was at least true, for they plodded up the causeway and were soon able to look down on the straight lines of street lamps in Karoz beneath and the black squares into which they divided the town unrelieved by the faintest flicker of light. On the hill opposite, Hamdi's palace was scarcely perceptible against the dull background of hills beyond. Then the road turned upon itself and the fortress loomed above their heads. It was black, sombre, forbidding, sinister, the scene of past bloodshed and cruelties of which no man may ever know. Its castellated ramparts clawed against the velvety sky and its bleak outlines stood hard and cold against the soft contour of the plushy hills beyond. There it squatted, straddling the ridge like some hideous monster, and as the road turned again and they came in sight of the black cavity which marked the greedy mouth, Edith could not restrain a shudder.

"Cheerful, homelike place, Dicky," said she.

"Glad you approve it—because that's where you sent the princess."

"Heavens! Is that where she has been? And Hamdi promised her the best of treatment! I will pay him off for this, one day."

"Sorry I didn't square the account when I had the chance!" growled Dick.

"Do you suppose that she is in there now?"

"I guess so—if they haven't strangled her."

"Dick——!"

"Well, that's a custom of this cheerful country, when a woman is *de trop*. Look here, Edith, you can intrigue with your own breed as much as you like, but just remember that when you start to intrigue with Orientals you're like a baby teaching its papa to shave!"

"I am beginning to find that out. Wish I'd known it before."

"It would not have made any difference. You would have had to mix in, just the same. You really have a lot to answer for, my dear; I never would have made my raid but for the abduction of the princess. Now suppose that she is dead—or worse——" Dick's voice carried the quiet, cold little note of indifference that is very apt to bring tears when addressed to a woman. But Edith was not of the weeping type, except when she needed the display of such emotion to gain some definite end.

"I'd rather see her dead—or worse—than see her yours, Dicky, or go through what I did to-day

when I saw you pitch off your pony. See here, Dick; you are a soldier; I am a woman. You make war in your way and I in mine. But suppose you wanted to take a certain strategic point and knew that you could do it but that it would mean sending a company or two of men to sure death. Would you do it?"

"Well, seeing as I did it two days ago I suppose it's useless to deny it. But I went with 'em."

"Well—here *I* am—and I'd have gone with the princess if I'd seen anything to help my play along by doing so!"

"You're clever, Edith."

"I'm frank. *You* are a bit of an unconscious hypocrite! Besides, I'm working for something that I really want—must have, and you are sacrificing lives for pay. I want you, Dicky-boy, and I'm going to have you in the end, even if somebody else has you first. Being a man you have no doubt had your love affairs, haven't you, Dicky?"

"One or two."

"Naturally. But let me tell you something. *I* never have!"

"What!"

"Don't be so surprised. It's not a nice tribute to my virtue! No, Dicky; I'm naughty and mischievous and self-willed and have no principles at all, but—I am a *one-man woman*! I have never wanted but one man and never will—and I'll have



him or nobody at all." There was a savage little cut to Edith's voice which Dick had never heard. "I don't care," she went on, "if the princess has been sewn up in a bag, bow-stringed or tossed to a brutal soldiery! I don't care if Razamachi has been crucified head-downward and Kostovo cooked in boiling oil! I don't care whether Karamania becomes a prosperous principality or a blood-soaked corner of hell! I am playing the game just as everybody else is—only you won't admit it—for what I want myself! And that——" she gave a semi-hysterical laugh, "is a lump of a fighting man that hasn't sense enough to know when a dweller of Olympus comes down to earth prepared to kill him with kindness!"

"Meaning, I suppose, that you are Venus?"

"We have very similar ideas on some things."

"Such as——"

"Mars, for example."

"But your mythological prototype was polyandrous."

"Don't, Dicky—you'll strain your heart! Well, maybe I will become so myself if disappointed."

"You ought to be spanked!"

"Why? It is not my fault! Here we come to our cheerful hostelry." Edith looked up at the scowling walls and shoved out her defiant little chin. "I don't care! I'm not afraid!"

"You are, though."

"I'm not! I am never afraid. Sometimes I get excited, but I have never been afraid in my life! It's not in my breed!"

Nevertheless, there was a slight tremor in her voice which led Dick to say, gently:

"You're a brave little girl, Edie, and as sandy as they make 'em! But there is really nothing to bother you here, beyond a certain amount of discomfort. A Turk never molests a woman who does not belong to his household, and besides you are known to be a friend of Hamdi Pasha and a woman of consequence. There's nothing to be afraid of, my dear."

The column had come to a halt as he spoke, its head having reached the gates. A moment later it was in motion again and they rode under the great arched doorway, then out into the enclosure within, where the soldiers were already stacking their arms.

Edith looked about her curiously. Dark as it was she could see that the place was very large and in a semi-ruined state. The tumbling walls surrounded a space of perhaps four acres which contained a number of dilapidated buildings, some of stone, others of wood. There appeared also to be a citadel, or inner fortress, surrounded by a separate wall of its own which enclosed a number of buildings in a rather better state of preservation, to judge from the cleaner lines made by the walls as they towered against the star-lit sky.

As Edith was standing at the side of Dick's



stretcher, waiting for what might next befall, Achmet Bey joined her.

"I will have to request that Madam la Comtesse will remain here in the fortress until I shall have received further instructions," said he in French.

"From whom, may I ask, do you expect to receive them, Achmet Bey?" asked Dick, with a trace of irony.

"From Hamdi Pasha," said the Turk.

"But Hamdi is a prisoner of my Akindschis."

"Not now, Osborne Pasha. There have been certain events of which you are not aware, but which it can do no harm for you to know. The Turkish garrison from Suruk, which surrendered to Razamachi Bey, arrived here in Karoz and found that the Karamanians were very weak, whereupon they rose against their guards and overpowered them. Next they drove the handful of Akindschis from about the fortress and rescued Hamdi Pasha. Excited by success they grew beyond control and attempted to loot Karoz, but were finally got in hand by Hamdi, who armed them from the fortress. He is now marching with them to attack Istria, first going to Suruk to collect as many of the dervishes as he may be able to find. General Kostovo and your Akindschis are hanging on his flanks. So you see, Osborne Pasha, matters have taken a turn in Hamdi's favour."

Dick gave a short laugh. "My word!" he said



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CHAPTER XXVIII

WITHIN, the place was dimly lighted by a piece of rag burning in a bowl of oil. It was a spacious chamber, stone paved and having two narrow, barred windows on the side of the castle yard. At one end of the room was a low-arched door which seemed to lead into a corridor beyond, where there was a flickering, uncertain light.

"There are two small rooms beyond, Osborne Pasha," said the captain; "one is already occupied by another prisoner. I will have rugs brought, and blankets; also some food."

He turned and went out, followed by the stretcher bearers, then closed and locked the door behind him. Scarcely had he gone when there came the sound of a light footstep in the corridor and a woman's voice said tremulously.

"Who is there?"

The words were Turkish, but at the tone of the voice Dick's heart bounded so violently that he clapped his hand to his chest with a gasp of pain. There was a moment of silence; then Edith said:

"Is that the Princess Lilear?"

"Yes——" A white-robed figure seemed to glide under the low arch of the door and into the room.

"Countess von Essingen! How did *you* come



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choking. He said that if it were a choice of taking Karamania or seeing Osborne Pasha shot, he would prefer the latter."

Edith gave a little cat-like snarl. "The brute!" she cried.

"Hamdi Pasha is an Oriental," said the princess, "and a very proud man. For Osborne Pasha, who is an outsider, to come here and conduct the campaign against him was enough to earn Hamdi's hatred. But worse than that, Osborne Pasha humiliated him before his guests. That is something which Hamdi could never forgive!"

"I wasn't polite, and that's a fact!" grunted Dick.

"What did you do?" asked Edith, in a trembling voice.

"Oh, I shoved the muzzle of a gun into his face and called him a dog of a Turcoman and a few other pet names like that."

"But why did you?" cried the princess. "Was that necessary?"

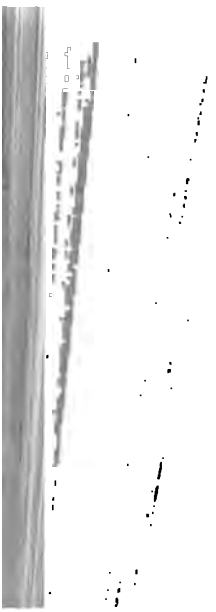
"I did it," said Dick, "because I was afraid that he had sent the Princess Lilear to his hareemlick."

There was a silence which lasted several minutes. Then the princess said, earnestly:

"There is but one chance for your life, Osborne Pasha, and that is to make your escape."

"That's out of the question," said Dick. "The slightest effort and I go flop!"

Edith's alert mind was working rapidly. There



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Edith felt her knees tottering under her, but she answered with spirit:

"Just the same, I am going to try. There's something in force of will, and it must be mine against Hamdi's. Besides, he has European ideas and is rather proud of his European affiliations. He would not care to have such a story told of him. Let us send for Achmet Bey. Is there a guard outside here?"

Without answering, the princess went to the window and called. A gruff voice answered, when there was a short conversation and they heard the man shuffling off.

"I want to say a few words to you alone, Princess Lilear," said Edith. "Excuse us, Dicky."

She walked toward the door leading into the corridor and the princess followed. A dim light was flickering from a doorway at the other end and at the entrance Edith paused and looked within. The place was small, with a low, barrel-vaulted ceiling. In one corner was a couch and in the other a wooden table on which were placed a basin, a water-jug and a primitive lamp of the sort in the large hall. Edith looked about her and shuddered.

"It is a real prison cell, is it not?" she said. "If I had thought that Hamdi was going to treat you like this I would never have betrayed you into his hands!"

"What!" cried the princess. "What are you saying, Countess von Essingen?"

Edith made a little gesture. "It was my doing," she said. "Hamdi told me that if he could manage to kidnap you the revolution would fall to pieces. Otherwise, he said that it would probably result in a very bloody little war with a great sacrifice of human life and perhaps the massacre of hundreds of helpless Christian women and children. So I hardened my heart and did it—although to be quite honest, that was not the real reason."

The princess made a little gurgling sound in her throat and stepped back, away from Edith.

"My real reason," Edith continued, "was because I was afraid that Osborne Pasha would be killed—and I love him. He is the only man whom I have ever loved, or ever will love. More than that, he loves me, deep down in his heart, otherwise he would be dead now. The bullet that would have killed him was stopped by a little portrait of myself that he has always carried in his pocket-book. Do you believe in Kismet, Princess Lilear?"

The princess did not answer. She was standing with her shoulders against the rough stone wall and even in the dim light Edith could see that her face was very pale and her eyes glowing like great black diamonds.

"But what I wanted to say to you is this," Edith continued. "I do not want you to suffer personally any more than I can help. Of course, I understand that if Hamdi conquers Karamania, as looks probable, you will lose all that you have, your



estates and revenues and all the rest. I am a very rich woman, and I want to——"

"Please be still!" interrupted the princess, in a voice as hard as the granite walls. "Do you think that I would ever take anything from *you?* To tell the truth, the idea crossed my mind that you might have had something to do with it all—but I put it out of my head. But it appears that you *did* do it —and now you are going to suffer for it!"

"I am already suffering for it——"

"But nothing to what you will suffer! Wait until Osborne Pasha is led out to be shot! And you will not have to wait very long, if I know anything about Turkish character! Nothing under heaven would induce Hamdi to spare Osborne Pasha's life after what has occurred! And that is all your doing, dear Countess von Essingen!"

Edith caught her breath.

"Go to Hamdi, if you like, and see what you can do!" continued the princess. "The chances are that before you get back to Karoz, Osborne Pasha will have ceased to exist!"

Edith seemed to feel her heart stop and for a moment the deep-shadowed walls closed in upon her, stifling her breath. Then the cold, low, deep-pitched voice went on, even and merciless.

"You ask me if I believe in Kismet. Yes, I do. It was written that one rich, idle, selfish woman, who did not love a man truly enough to sacrifice a grain of her ambition to marry him when she might have

done so, should be the cause of his cold-blooded murder, to say nothing of having sent about two thousand men to their death—and I do not know how many more! Besides that, you have provided a future of cruelty and oppression for an innocent people, with whom you had no concern. We Karamanians are beaten. The Akindschis are destroyed; Kostovo's Sepahis have no ammunition and Istria is practically defenceless, for what can the home guard, old men and boys with worthless weapons, do against trained troops? You do not know what it means, perhaps, for such a town to be taken, here in the Balkans, especially by an hereditary enemy and of a different faith. I hope that you are satisfied, Countess von Essingen!"

Edith leaned against the wall and buried her face in her hands. For several moments she stood so without speaking. Then there came the sound of voices in the adjoining room and Dick called out cheerfully:

"Ladies—here is our dinner. I don't know how you feel, but I am good and hungry!"

Edith recovered herself with an effort and walked unsteadily back to where Dick was lying composedly upon his stretcher. Some soldiers were placing lamps here and there while others took food from a large basket. A square table and two stools were brought, after which the men went out, leaving one of their number in attendance.

From a social point of view the meal left much to



be desired. Edith forced herself to eat a little, knowing that in the next few hours she was going to need her strength, but the princess declined all food. Little was said and it was a relief to all when presently the captain of the guard entered with the request that Edith accompany him to the quarters of Achmet Pasha.

"Good luck, old girl," said Dick, cheerfully. "Achmet is all right. Whatever else he may be he is at least a gentleman, like most Turks of his caste." He turned to the captain. "Where is Hamdi Pasha?" he asked. "You need not be afraid to tell me, since I am a prisoner."

The man hesitated, then answered quietly:

"He is dining with Achmet Bey."

CHAPTER XXIX

When Edith, following the captain of the guard, arrived at headquarters, she was shown into a large bare room, scrupulously clean, comfortably furnished and lighted by modern lamps. At a big oak table in the centre of the room were sitting Hamdi Pasha and Achmet Bey. Both men rose as she entered and saluted her respectfully.

"I have learned to my great regret, dear madam," said Hamdi, after greeting her, "that you had the misfortune to be taken prisoner. I hope," he smiled pleasantly, "that you have not enlisted your sympathies upon the other side—especially as we were, in a measure, allies." His lustrous eyes looked at her meaningly.

"There is no question of partisanship so far as I am concerned, Hamdi Pasha," Edith answered. "For my part, all that I have ever wished for has been to prevent this wretched war altogether. I do not appear to have met with much success!"

Hamdi smiled and made a little gesture with his hand. "It is hard to tell what such wild cattle as these hill people will do," he said in so agreeable a tone that Edith's heart rose within her. "However, we hope for better order in the future. For the present, as soon as you have sufficiently rested I will detail an escort to conduct you back to Istria."



"That is very kind of you," answered Edith. "But as you may have guessed, it is not what I have come to request. I should like to ask what your plan may be in regard to my friend, Osborne Pasha?"

Hamdi waved his well-shaped hand in a gesture indicative of the dismissal of a subject of minor importance.

"That is a matter which I have not yet considered. Of course, for the present, military necessity makes it imperative to hold him prisoner. But you need have no fear. Everything possible shall be done for his comfort."

Edith regarded him closely. If she had not been told that Hamdi would take some similar course, all of her anxiety would have been immediately relieved, so agreeable was the manner and expression of the Turk. But aside from being forewarned there was some impalpable quality which aroused her suspicion. She was a woman of powerful, primitive instincts and not entirely dependent on her five senses for the receipt of an impression. Subconsciously she felt that Hamdi was lying, and lying in a most subtle way in merely dismissing the subject as one to which as yet he had given no thought.

"Hamdi Pasha," said Edith, "I do not often ask favours, but I wish to request one of you."

Hamdi bowed. "To hear is to comply, dear madam," said he, with another smile.

"You know Osborne Pasha to be a man of his word, do you not?" asked Edith.

"Unfortunately, my knowledge of Osborne Pasha is very slight."

Edith turned to the other man. "Achmet Bey," she said, "knows Osborne Pasha very well. Is it not true, Colonel Achmet Bey, that Osborne Pasha has the reputation of being a man whose word is inviolable?"

"So I have heard, madam," said Achmet.

Edith turned again to Hamdi. "What I wish to request," said she, "is that you accept Osborne Pasha's parole that he will leave the country immediately and not return. He is now seriously wounded and can take no further active part in the hostilities. If you will detail a guard to escort Osborne Pasha and myself to the railroad at Mitrovitza, he will give his parole not to return."

Hamdi regarded her thoughtfully, then slowly nodded his fine head.

"I see no reason for refusing your request, madam," he said, then glanced at Achmet Bey. Again Edith's heart seemed to turn to ice, for in spite of the gentle manner and the pleasant voice there came that instinctive, subconscious distrust. The affair was too easy, too casual. Moreover, it was not consistent with what Hamdi had said to the princess. She felt that if Hamdi really was speaking truth he would have made some opposition, lain some stress upon the personal sacrifice that he was making in overlooking the indignities to which Dick had subjected him. But like the jiu-jitsu



wrestler, there was nothing to grasp, no resistance, no opposition.

In despair, Edith glanced at Achmet Bey, and as she did so caught in his eyes the merest flicker of warning. In that instant she knew that Hamdi was merely putting her off, getting rid of her, and that Dick's doom was sealed. She had gone to the interview expecting a combat of wills and had summoned all of her force for the strife. But here was no opposition—merely polite and amiable acquiescence.

In despair she looked again at Achmet and thought that she detected the faintest expression of pity in the fine eyes of the Ottoman. Then she glanced at Hamdi who was regarding her with a look of mild friendliness which had in it a note of dismissal. He was still standing and his attitude suggested that now, the interview being at an end, he had other things which claimed his attention.

Woman of the world as she was, Edith saw the utter uselessness of remaining longer. To tell Hamdi that she doubted his word would be merely to offer him an insult which might arouse his resentment and could do no possible good. Her mind was working rapidly and in the desperation of the moment she received a sudden inspiration. Her face broke into its most ravishing smile, as with the colour in her cheeks she held out her hand.

"This is most kind and generous of you, *mon ami*," she said, in her sweetest voice. "But it is no

surprise, as from all that I have seen and heard of Hamdi Pasha I expected to find him as generous as he is brave. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness to my wounded friend, and now, as I know that you are very busy, I will ask Colonel Achmet Bey to escort me back to the quarters assigned us."

Hamdi shot her a quick glance of suspicion, but Edith's face was as pleasantly free from any design as his own had been but a few moments before. The guard who had brought her was waiting outside the door, and for an instant Hamdi was on the point of politely expressing his regret that he had need of Achmet Bey and requesting that she excuse him and return with the soldier. But Achmet Bey had already stepped to the door and opened it with a bow and the psychological moment passed before Hamdi could frame his objection, so he bowed himself and with the request that she command him when ready to leave the fortress, wished her good-night.

As Edith and Achmet Bey started to walk across the enclosure, Edith said to the Turk:

"Colonel Achmet Bey, I wish to have a few words with you in private. Is there any place where we may speak together unobserved?"

Achmet hesitated. "If it has anything to do with Osborne Pasha, madam," said he, "there is nothing more for me to add to what Hamdi Pasha has already told you."



"It has to do with Osborne Pasha," answered Edith, "also with myself—and a great deal to do with Colonel Achmet Bey, who might hear of something very much to his advantage."

Achmet glanced at her quickly. Then: "Let us walk over here and ascend to the ramparts," said he, "but I must request that madam will be brief, as Hamdi Pasha will expect me to return immediately."

"It will not take long," said Edith, and followed the Turk to a short flight of steps which led up a sort of terrace, built against the wall of the fortress. Assuring herself that there was nobody near, Edith turned to her companion.

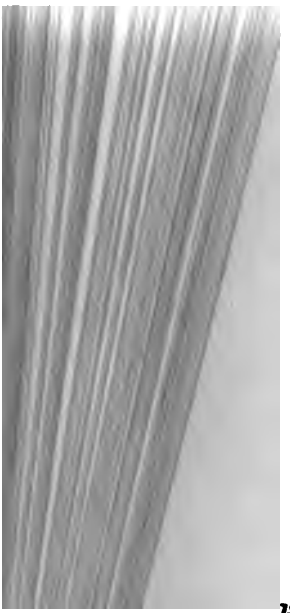
"Hamdi Pasha was not telling me the truth," she said. "He means to put Osborne Pasha to death."

Achmet did not answer.

"*Mon colonel*," Edith went on, softly, "what have you to gain by supporting Hamdi Pasha?"

"That, madam," said the Turk, glancing about him, "is a matter which we can scarcely discuss."

"I will be brief," said Edith, seeing that the Turk was nervous and impatient. "No doubt Hamdi has promised you a share in the government and revenues of Karamania. On the other hand, by deserting with your regiment from the Turkish army, your life becomes forfeit to the Sultan, should you be taken in Turkey. Also, you are a soldier and Hamdi Pasha a clever and cunning diplomat, and it is more than probable that after having made



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the profit, I am, as Hamdi may have informed you, an American and enormously rich."

Achmet Bey gave a somewhat sulky nod.

"Osborne Pasha," said Edith, "is my friend, and the friend of my brother who is richer even than myself and is now lying at Istria recovering from wounds given him in the defence of the Princess Lilear against Hamdi Pasha's Montenegrins. There is no man on earth who is so dear to my brother as Osborne Pasha, so in speaking for myself I speak for him also. Now if you, Achmet Bey, will march out of this place at dawn, taking with you Osborne Pasha, the Princess Lilear and myself, and sending us under guard to Istria, return to Rahut with your regiment, I will pledge myself to pay you the sum of half a million francs!"

For a moment Achmet stared at her, his surprise overmastering even his Oriental self-possession. Edith went on, rapidly.

"The best way in which to proceed, Colonel Achmet Bey," said she, "would be this. Place Hamdi Pasha himself under arrest; you have a well disciplined regiment behind you. Take him with you to Rahut and hold him there, then, leaving your garrison under the command of one of your officers, come with us to Istria, where my brother will arrange with you for the payment of the sum. Of course, it will be necessary for you to take my word for the present, but we Americans"—she drew herself up proudly—"are in the habit of confidence in such

matters and we do not tell lies. My brother would never forgive me if I were to allow his friend to be murdered for a matter of one hundred thousand American dollars!"

The Turk was very much agitated. To tell the truth, he had himself begun to wonder what was going to be the outcome of his act in supporting Hamdi, whom he was inclined to distrust, and had several times heartily wished himself well out of the business. Here, it seemed, was a way of cancelling all risk and very possibly winning a sum which impressed him as princely. He had learned from Hamdi, even as Edith had said, that the American lady was fabulously rich, and he also understood that Americans, like the English, were people of their word.

As he was somewhat hopelessly trying to grasp the situation in its entirety, there came a flood of light from the suddenly-opened door of the headquarters and he heard Hamdi sharply call for the captain of the guard. A moment later they saw the dark figure of the man hurrying across the yard of the fortress in the direction of the quarters where the prisoners were confined. Edith laid her hand upon his arm.

"We must act quickly, colonel," she said, "or Hamdi will become suspicious. There can be no doubt as to your decision; no doubt as to what any sensible man would do under the circumstances. Your position is not a good one; I offer you a means of



not only remedying it, but coming out of the affair a rich man, for in your country I understand that this half million francs is a very large sum."

"It is an enormous sum——" muttered the perplexed officer, "so large, in fact, that to be quite frank, madam, I am not sure that it will be paid!"

"You need have no fears on that score! I paid as much last year for my jewels. Do you think that I would hesitate to pay it for the life of a friend?"

"And when would I receive it?"

"As soon as my brother is able to travel, which should be very soon. We will meet you in Saloniki when you will receive the amount as soon as the money can be got from the bank. In the meanwhile you shall hold his check. Then it is understood?" She glanced toward the other side of the enclosure. "Here is the guard coming back. Go with me now to where Osborne Pasha is confined, then return and report to Hamdi that I delayed you by requesting certain things for the night, which you have been trying to obtain—lights, food, bedding—anything you like. Then at dawn, have your battalion ready to march. You need not tell Hamdi until then that he is to consider himself your prisoner, and see to it that you have a guard of your own men ready at hand, for he will not submit without a struggle! All of this you can arrange as seems best to you. Now let us go back."

She led the way down the steps, Achmet at her



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CHAPTER XXX

For several minutes after the departure of Edith the silence between Dick and the princess remained unbroken. The Turkish orderly having prepared a couch in one corner of the room, gently assisted Dick to lie upon it, then saluted and went out, locking the door behind him. For some moments Dick lay fighting the faintness resulting from the exertion.

Presently the princess said gently:

"Are you suffering much pain, Osborne Pasha?"

"A little," he answered, breathing heavily, then with a smile:

"It looks as if I wouldn't have to suffer much longer, doesn't it? Hamdi must have ridden in to make sure of the job!"

The princess was unable to answer.

"I have often tasted of defeat," said Dick, "but never anything as bitter as this! Mind you, I'm not thinking of myself, that is all a part of the game. What bothers me is the loss of our Cause—Karamania!"

"It is not your fault——" she answered, brokenly. "For my part, all that I could ask is that your life be spared!"

Dick groaned. "Wish I could have got hit in

time to have saved that slaughter of the Akindschis!" He moved restlessly. The princess crossed the room and seated herself by the head of his couch, her back against the wall.

"So it was written, Osborne Pasha. At least they died like brave men, fighting for their hearthstones. One could hardly ask for a better end. Your own fate is much—more bitter!" She covered her face with her hands.

Dick turned slightly toward her.

"It was all my fault," said he, "in bringing my friends to Istria. Will you forgive me?"

He stretched out his arm. The princess let her hand fall into his own, and then gently withdrew it.

"Do not blame yourself, Osborne Pasha. Treachery in those we love always comes to us as a surprise. The Countess von Essingen——"

"Don't be too hard on her," said Dick. "There's no doubt that she honestly meant to avert bloodshed, not to cause it. And she's since tried her best to make amends." He told of Edith's night ride with Kostovo and of what had happened afterwards. The princess listened in silence, nor did she speak for some moments after he had finished. Then she said, wearily:

"It is Kismet. Let us hope that she may succeed with Hamdi Pasha and that you may be permitted to leave this country in peace. There is a curse over Karamania. If you escape, Osborne

Pasha, you—you will marry her, and give up warfare as a trade, will you not?"

Dick stared at her through the murk.

"No," he answered, shortly. "There is no reason why I should do either."

"But if she succeeds in saving your life, it will belong to her!"

"Can't see it that way."

"You love her still, Osborne Pasha."

"I don't anything of the sort! If I did do you s'ppose I'd sit like a Chinese joss while she makes love to me? The chances are she wouldn't do it, if she thought that *I* cared. She's just naturally perverse! I loved her once, as I told you, and loved her for all that there was in me, but *she* put that high-flyin' sentiment out of its misery, and I couldn't love her now if she were to be chopped up into little pieces for my sake! I admire her gameness and her high vitality and all that, but love her? Not one speck!"

The bosom of the princess was rising and falling rapidly and for a moment she did not speak. When the words came they were slightly breathless.

"Then why do you carry her picture in your pocket-book? Why *have* you carried it all of these months?"

"Ho! She told you about that, did she? Well, then—bring the lamp over here and I'll show you something."

The princess hesitated, then crossed the room,

took the lamp from its niche and with hands that slightly trembled, set it on the stone flagging beside the stretcher. Dick drew out his pocket-book and took from it the small, mutilated portrait.

"Look here," said he. "What do you see on the back?"

The princess took the photograph and held its back to the feeble glare of the lamp.

"It is covered with writing. What is it?"

"A confession—or admission of guilt."

"What do you mean?"

"It is the confession of a bandit whom I once collared; the chief of a band. It's a long story. I finally let him go, after his giving me this signed statement which I hold as a guarantee of his good behaviour. This, if put in the hands of certain authorities, would cost him his life."

"But why did you have him write it there?"

"Because at the time of his capture it was the only available stationery at hand. That was before——"

"Her marriage?"

"Well, as a matter of fact it wasn't—but it was before I had heard of it. When I did know, the thing appealed to my sense of the bizarre. Thought I, 'Your image ruined the life of an honest man and now it carries on its back the life of a rascal—and a jolly good place for it, too.' That was how I happened to have the picture."

"Did you tell her that?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There was no need. She had just been through a lot and she was risking her life to look after me when I was out of action. Besides, I felt rather ashamed. It wasn't a very nice thing to do. And the picture had just saved my life. I say, to change the subject, tell me what happened to Razamachi."

"It was dreadful, Osborne Pasha. Razamachi and his men rode in, thinking, no doubt, that there was only a handful of men left from the garrison. The guard at the gate took them for the Montenegrin Sepahis, and did not find out their mistake until fifty-two of them had entered. Then, discovering that they were the Akindschis, the alarm was given. The gates were closed and the soldiers of the garrison opened fire from their barracks, on all sides. It was dark, but there were fires in the sconces which gave light enough to shoot by. The Akindschis were thrown into confusion and did not know which way to turn. Many were killed in assaulting the barracks and in the end they were slaughtered to a man. Razamachi Bey was among the first to fall."

Dick swore softly under his breath. The princess rose to her feet.

"Now you must rest, Osborne Pasha. I will call the guard to make you comfortable."

Dick stretched out his hand. "Don't go," said he, "unless you are tired yourself. I slept all of

the afternoon—and the chances are that I will get a much longer nap before many hours!" he added, in a dry voice.

"You are a very brave man, Osborne Pasha," she said, almost in a whisper. "Have you no fear?"

"I don't think so. We've all got to die sometime, and it might as well be now as later."

"But it is so different—to have to die in cold blood—ah, it must not be! It must not be!"

Her voice shook and she swayed her body slightly back and forth. Dick laid his hand on hers and she let it rest there.

"'What is to be will be,'" quoted Dick, in Arabic. "There is nothing in the future to frighten me."

"Then you believe in a future? in God?"

"Of course I do. I have seen too much of life to believe in death. My life has been fairly clean and honest, and as for my calling, I believe in war. Nations with a past record of clean warfare have always produced the finest race. It is an act of sublime generosity to die for a cause and the example is one of the most tremendous value to succeeding generations. Even holy writ is full of praiseworthy warfare. No doubt the day may come when the world will have reached such a state of enlightenment that it will no longer need the cleansing agency of war, but it hasn't come yet by a good deal, nor will it come as long as dishonesty and selfishness and hatred remain. It makes me tired



when people talk of the immorality of strife, and the chances are that if you flatly contradicted the peace advocate he would want to punch your head. No, I'm not afraid to face whatever's in store for me. What I *do* hate about it is doing so at the order of a swine like Hamdi!"

The princess sprang to her feet and began to walk back and forth. Her hands were tightly clenched and even in the dark her face shone with an unnatural pallor. All of the shuddering breathlessness had left her voice, and when she spoke the words came short and distinct.

"If Hamdi brings about your death, Osborne Pasha," she said, "I promise you that he shall not long survive it!"

"Nonsense," Dick answered, sharply. "Don't you go and make a mess of your future through any such idea as that! It is all a part of the game! Twenty-four hours ago I was on the point of ordering Hamdi shot——"

"Oh, why didn't you? Why didn't you?"

"Because I wanted to hold him as hostage for you!"

"But that was so wrong! So foolish! What did *I* matter——"

"You mattered a lot to me!"

The princess stopped and turned her face in his direction.

"What could I matter to you, Osborne Pasha?" she asked, and the tremulousness had returned to



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princess, bitterly, "but still she must try to intrigue!"

Dick gave a short, mirthless laugh. "The Countess von Essingen can no more keep out of intrigue than a duck can keep out of water!" he answered. "It is a pity, because underneath all of her shifty methods she is kind and generous enough at heart."

"How can you say that?" cried the princess. "If ever there was a selfish, unscrupulous woman it is she! Kind! She is about as kind as a cat slipping through the grass to spring on a thrush! Do you call it generous for a woman to betray her hostess into the hands of her most dangerous enemy?"

"Her motive was not so bad," said Dick.

"Indeed?" the princess' voice was like ice. "Her motive was nothing else than a blind, unfounded jealousy! No doubt she told you that it was to prevent bloodshed, or some such silly twaddle. You are not a fool, Osborne Pasha, and I can't see how you could believe such nonsense as that! She betrayed me to Hamdi because she was jealous of me! She thought that you were showing more attention to me than to herself! If it were not for her wicked meddling you would not be here now, waiting for your death sentence! We would all be at Istria—protected by our brave Akindschis and the rest, and there would still be some hope for Karamania!"

"I am not so sure," said Dick. "The sheiks were all insisting that we take the field. I doubt if I could have held them."

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degraded beast of a Kurd would have done such a thing when he had eaten of your bread and slept beneath your roof!" She stood swaying, her breath coming in gasps, fighting to restrain the wild rage that seemed about to strangle her.

"Not as she saw it," said Dick, quietly. "No doubt she thought that she was saving you from yourself and from being a martyr to your cause——"

"What affair was that of hers?"

"Well—her brother was lying badly wounded in the palace—and there was an army of fanatical dervishes marching on Istria. She knew that we were not prepared to fight."

The princess choked back what she was about to say and walked to the window again. For a moment Dick looked at the graceful figure, dimly outlined against the dark stone walls. His voice softened.

"If I forgive her," he said, "don't you think that you might?"

"I? Never!" the princess' voice was a bottled shriek.

"But just consider. She had no idea of what a snake Hamdi is. She had known him in a civilised country as a kindly, courteous gentleman. She knew nothing of the Oriental aspect of his nature. He told her that you would be well treated, that your revenues would continue as before——"

"Oh, hush! Hush, Osborne Pasha, before you make me say things that I may be sorry for—afterwards——" the low voice of the princess broke. "Do



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got to say about it. They are just standing you off, Edith."

"Hamdi, maybe," Edith answered; "but not Achmet."

"What makes you think that? Hamdi's not the only liar in Turkey."

"Well, then, Dicky-bird, if you don't believe me, wait and see. You don't seem to be taking your prospective execution very hard anyhow, so you might as well sleep on it. That's what I'm going to do." She gave a little yawn. "This has been my busy day. To-morrow may be even busier." She turned to the princess. "I think that I have managed to save your country for you also, madam," said she, in such a tone as one might use to announce the possible recovery of a sick kitten.

"Look here, Edith," said Dick, "what are you driving at, anyhow? This is a pretty serious matter."

"Then why are you so quick to assume that I don't know what I am talking about? The truth is, I have persuaded Achmet to withdraw his troops and return to his post at Rahut, taking us with him. As soon as it is safe we will be conducted back to Istria. That's all."

There followed a moment of utter and absolute silence. It was broken by a low, gurgling laugh from the princess; a laugh that brought the blood even to the cheeks of Dick and left Edith as straight and cold as a pillar of ice.



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CHAPTER XXXI

EDITH was awakened by a fanfare of Turkish bugles from without. She opened her eyes and saw the thin light of the dawn struggling through the barred windows. Looking toward the other corner of the room she saw Dick, sitting upright upon his couch, washing his face in a basin of water. At the foot of the couch were two soldiers, leaning upon their rifles and waiting patiently for him to finish his ablutions.

She raised herself quickly. Dick glanced across in her direction.

"Good-morning," he said, in a somewhat hollow voice. "What's all this you were giving me last night about having got me off?"

"The truth, Dicky——" Edith made a desperate effort to steady her voice which was made tremulous by the somewhat sinister aspect of the Turks, one of whom was a sergeant and the other the captain of the guard.

"The truth, eh? Well, these johnnies tell me to come out and be shot!"

Edith stared at him wildly. For a moment her heart seemed to be a solid lump of ice and she fought back an impulse to shriek.

With a tremendous effort she regained her self-control.

"No fear, Dicky," said she. "You are not going to be shot. Achmet has decided to wait until the eleventh hour, that's all."

Dick paused in his bathing and looked at her intently.

"Look here, Edith," said he, "are you trying to let me down easy—or what? Because if you are, it's a mistaken kindness. I'm not afraid to die—but if I *am* to die, I want to know it! This suspense is rotten!"

There was a rustle from the doorway and the princess appeared. Without a glance at Dick or Edith she walked to the narrow window and looked out.

"What d'ye see?" growled Dick.

For a moment the princess seemed unable to speak; then she answered in a shaking voice:

"Achmet's regiment is drawn up under arms. Achmet and Hamdi are standing in front of their quarters, talking." She turned furiously to Edith. "So this is the way you have saved him, is it? And Karamania also!" she added, in a bitter, sneering voice.

"Oh, wait! wait! Give Achmet a chance!" Edith's nerves were almost beyond control, and her tone was harsh, almost rough. She quickly arranged her costume, slipped on her riding-boots, then walked somewhat unsteadily across the room to the window by which the princess was standing.

Achmet's battalion was already drawn up, the

men at "rest." In front of the headquarters Hamdi and Achmet were apparently engaged in a passionate discussion. The sun had almost risen and in the fast growing light the two women, watching intently, could see that the face of Achmet was very pale, while Hamdi's looked black and congested.

Suddenly Achmet turned to the nearest company and raised his hand. A squad of men fell out and, with fixed bayonets, came marching toward him. Hamdi stared at them for an instant, then sprang back a pace and flinging out both hands burst into a violent flow of speech. Achmet, standing straight as a lance, listened stonily.

The squad drew near, then at a curt word of command from the umbashi separated, as though to surround Hamdi Pasha. Achmet, who was still standing rigidly, his drawn sword in his hand, stepped forward also. Edith's hand fell on the arm of the princess and gripped it until the other woman wrenched herself away, with a little cry of pain.

Hamdi glanced quickly to right and left and even at the distance the watchers could see the flash of his white teeth as his lips drew back in a savage snarl. Then his hand flew to his hip and a long-barrelled revolver flashed out. But before the weapon could be raised Achmet sprang in and lunged savagely—and those watching saw the reddened steel stand out a foot between the shoulder-blades of Hamdi Pasha.



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manner peculiar to their fatalistic ideas. It was a well disciplined force and never thought to question the word of its commander. So back to Rahut they trudged and with never a thought as to whether Karamania was destined to belong to the Sultan, to Hamdi's possible successor or to itself.

Colonel Achmet Bey rode at the head of the column. An ambulance had been secured for Dick, while the Turkish wounded were transported in *arabas*. Edith and the princess were mounted, but while the princess rode near the ambulance, Edith had dropped some distance to the rear. Nor did she once come within speaking distance of the others until they had made their noon-day halt at a small hamlet on the line of march.

"You are very exclusive," Dick said to her, as they were eating their bread and olives.

Edith smiled faintly and slightly raised her pretty shoulders. Her face lacked its usual high colour and there were dark circles under her eyes.

"You have not told us yet," said Dick, "just how you brought about this wonderful change in our fortunes." He looked at her keenly from where he lay in the shade of a plane tree. The princess also threw a quick, curious glance towards Edith. The two women had not exchanged a word since they had marched out from the fortress at Karoz. A semi-bewildered embarrassment seemed to envelop the princess while Edith had appeared coolly and calmly oblivious to her existence. For that matter,

she had been quite unconsious of Dick's presence also, riding the route enveloped in her own thoughts.

"It was not difficult," she answered, in a weary voice. "I pointed out to Colonel Achmet Bey that he was merely running his head into a noose and that Hamdi was utterly unreliable and unscrupulous and would use him for what he was worth, then either throw him over or make him a scapegoat. He finally agreed with me that there was nothing in it."

Dick regarded her quizzically, then glanced at the princess, who merely raised her eyebrows. If Edith noticed the look, she did not betray it.

"The colonel was rather disgusted with the whole business," she said, indifferently. "He had about made up his mind to chuck the thing, and it only needed my few words to turn the scale. That's all there is to it."

Neither Dick nor the princess made any answer and presently Edith got up and strolled away. Dick looked thoughtfully after her.

"The strain of the last few days has been too much for her," he said to the princess. "There's nothing very odd about that. But it strikes me as mighty odd that she should have been able to point out to Achmet anything that he did not already know and had not decided to act upon."

"Perhaps he had already made up his mind to do what he did, Osborne Pasha."

"Don't believe it!" Dick's brows knit. "Do you know what I *do* believe?"

"What?"

"That she bribed him."

"Bribed Achmet Bey!" exclaimed the princess.

"Yes. She is a very rich woman." Dick frowned. "Turks are all bribable, more or less. Bet you what you like that she bribed Achmet to march back to Rahut—and then send us to Istria!"

A line appeared upon the princess' broad forehead and her eyes narrowed.

"If I had thought that——" she began.

"What would you have done?"

The princess looked at him with a troubled face. "Nothing, I suppose," she said, "since it was the only way of saving your life. But——" the words came through her teeth, "I would rather die myself than be under this obligation to her! I would rather that Karamania should writhe under the rule of Hamdi Pasha—or any other tyrant—than feel that her freedom had been bought by this woman's money! I am going to ask her, and if it is true, then Karamania shall remain as it was before, a Turkish sanjak!"

Dick slightly raised his eyebrows.

"Fancy old Kostovo and the sheiks would have somethin' to say about that," he answered.

The princess leaped to her feet, and stamped her foot angrily.

"You seem to forget, Osborne Pasha, that if Karamania is to be independent, I am to rule! I am the only lineal descendant of the old line of heredi-

tary chiefs! If I were to abdicate, then who else would there be?"

"Don't worry. Kostovo would mighty well look after that!" Dick glanced at her with a shade of reproof in his grey eyes. "And it strikes me, if you will permit me to say so, that you would not be justified in doing this, after the sacrifice of Karamanian lives."

The light eyes of the princess opened wide, then narrowed again; a characteristic expression when very angry. The colour flooded her clear skin.

"Nevertheless, I *would* abdicate—sooner than to be put on the throne by the money of this meddling woman!"

"You are making a personal thing of a general Cause," said Dick, with a touch of austerity. "Think of the Karamanian blood that has been poured out for Karamanian liberty! What right have you to let your own selfish pride undo all that has been gained, and at such a cost? You should think of your country, Princess Lilear, not of yourself."

Her face grew pale again. "How do you dare to speak to me like that?" she cried.

"Think it over for a moment and you will see for yourself." Dick returned to his bread and olives.

For a moment the princess stared at him with quivering lips. Then without a word she turned and walked slowly away.

Dick finished his repast, then leaned back against

the trunk of the tree and lit a cigarette. He was smoking thoughtfully when Edith returned, carrying in her hand a small bowl.

"Eat this, Dicky," said she. "It is *youghat*—a sort of clabber, is it not? The woman in that little khan gave it to me. It looks very nice."

He thanked her, then took the bowl and set it on the ground.

"Edith," said he, looking up through a wreath of smoke, "how much did you promise Achmet Bey for this job?"

Edith compressed her lips. "None of your business, Dicky. Who told you that I had promised him anything?"

"Never mind. What was the amount?"

Edith smiled and raised her pretty chin.

"As I remarked before, Dick, that is my own affair. It is not to be discussed."

"Then it *was* a bribe!"

Edith hummed a little air. Then she looked at Dick and laughed.

"See here, Edith, I want to know. Because some day it must be repaid."

"It would take you too long, Dicky-mine——" She gave him a teasing glance.

"Then Karamania must pay it. At any rate, it has got to be paid. My dear, I understand Turkish character as well as any outsider, and I smell a large sum of money in this deal. It was very wise and brave and generous of you to do what you have

done, and for my part, it puts me hopelessly in your debt. You have saved my life, when no other power short of a divine one could have done so. Please consider me as your man. My future is yours to command."

The colour flamed into Edith's face and she gave him a sudden look of such intensity that Dick's eyes fell and his swarthy skin grew even darker. Then the blood faded slowly from Edith's face, leaving her quite pale and the tears gushed into her violet eyes.

"No, Dicky. What I want is not a marketable commodity. I must win it of myself—or else go without. It is something which cannot be bought. I felt this when I made my offer to Achmet Bey—and I was right. Stick to your princess, Dicky; you are not a man who can be sold—then bought back again." She raised her hand and dashed the tears from her eyes, then broke into a laugh.

"Bless you my children——" she said, in a choking voice, and turning, walked quickly away.

CHAPTER XXXII

A MONTH later a midnight council was held in the Hall of the Janissaries at Istria.

The Princess Lilear was formally accepted as queen-elect. Kostovo was appointed as Prime Minister and was instructed to arrange for the queen a marriage which should meet with the approbation of the ministers. The council also voted, in consideration of a point raised by Osborne Pasha, that should the Princess Lilear feel herself at any time unwilling or unable to perform the duties of a sovereign, she was to be granted the right of abdication, when a suitable allowance would be guaranteed her by the State.

It was furthermore voted that to Osborne Pasha, in consideration of his invaluable services in the struggle for the freedom of Karamania, should be paid for the next five years a percentage of the export duties accruing to the crown on the revenues of the horse-sales of the entire country. Finally, in recognition of friendship and favours shown, an unofficial testimonial should be drawn up and forwarded to the Countess von Essingen and her brother, James Gordon Effendi, upon the latter of whom the honorary title of Bey was therewith conferred, with a new decoration created since the struggle for Karamanian liberty. As a further

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For several minutes after his departure neither spoke. The princess sat like a figure of stone, staring straight down the gloomy hall, where the black shadows moved restlessly with the flicker of the red flames in the braziers and the black openings of the *oda* suggested the lurking places of sinister creatures of the dark. The lare from the low-burning embers was reflected ruddily from the princess' face and touched the heavy coils of her hair with lurid tones of colour.

But no hint of any emotion was betrayed by the pale, inscrutable features. Straight down the hall she looked nor did so much as the quiver of a single finger of the small hand, half hidden in the fold of her *feridjé*, reveal the thoughts which were passing behind her eyes.

At her side stood Dick, equally silent, equally immobile, waiting until it should please her to speak. As the moments passed and the stillness remained unbroken and the gloom deepened while the braziers burned low, a new-born tenderness began to stir within him. A warm emotion, which was not entirely pity, awakened at sight of the small, veiled figure. Some quality in the pathetic droop of the shoulders, even while the little head was held proudly erect, aroused in the man every deep, protective instinct.

For besides that which he already knew, the council had told much more. The Princess Lilear had from the first been to her people less an in-



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that is precisely what I wanted to do—and what you told me was a selfish and unworthy course to take! Certainly, there is nothing which I desire less than to occupy a throne bought by the money of a woman whom I despise!"

She stopped, breathing rapidly. Dick turned his head and tried to see her face through the deepening gloom. An ember in one of the braziers flared up brilliantly and the shadows retreated into the deeper recesses of the gloomy hall. In the sudden glare the princess, enveloped in her shimmering *feridjé*, seemed to move forward on the divan, standing out vividly against the deep-toned darkness beyond.

As Dick looked into her face the long lashes swept up and her eyes met his. The flaming embers expired; the darkness deepened. Dick moved restlessly.

"It is true that I advised you to sacrifice your own feelings in the matter and remain. That was a month ago. Since then the conditions have changed. Your uncle, General Kostovo, is a very ambitious man. He is patriotic, to a certain extent, and where Karamania is concerned I have no doubt as to the sincerity of his intentions, but he intends to rule Karamania himself."

"Osborne Pasha!"

"That is true. I have positive information that during the past month he has been building up a party of his own which will support him in any-



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my influence with the people is very great. All of the proceedings to-night, in so far as you were concerned, have been merely to gain time and to blind my eyes to deeper plans. He is a bit afraid of me."

"Surely you do not think that he would do me any harm!"

"No. I do not think that. I think, however, that he would manage to set you aside. On the other hand, if you were to abdicate now, and of your own accord, he would be quite ready and eager to make you a good settlement, far more, no doubt, than up to this time you have ever received. I can see that he has been getting restless at my remaining here, now that the active campaign is all over, and in fact, I have no real excuse for doing so, as I am quite sound again. But I have stopped on merely to satisfy myself that your own interests were not in danger. I cannot decently stay much longer, as all of the work for which I was engaged is done. But I will not go until I know that your future is assured."

For a moment the princess did not answer. Then she said in a low, vibrant voice:

"Thank you, Osborne Pasha."

"You see," said Dick—and there was a sudden change in his tone from the thoughtful counsellor to the personal friend. "After all, it was *your* service which I really entered, and I do not feel that this is quite over. No doubt you will be glad when



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sively.

"Known what—Osbor...

dropped in key and there entered a tender note, a quality which was gentle to the point of a caress, such as the princess had never heard in it before, and which set her heart to beating furiously. He turned to her and his sleeve brushed her shoulder as he stooped lower. "I was nearly frantic! Five minutes before I had been urging for the good of Karamania that the Akindschis should be mustered out, and Razamachi, poor chap, was yapping like a Stamboul dog! I was for shelving the whole business for the time—and even when the scout came and reported that the dervishes were marching on Istria I would have done no more than to take defensive measures. But when the sentry came to say that my princess——" he dwelt tenderly on the "my."

"Then you rode out of Istria like a whirlwind, at the head of a thousand Akindschis! *Why*, Osborne Pasha?"

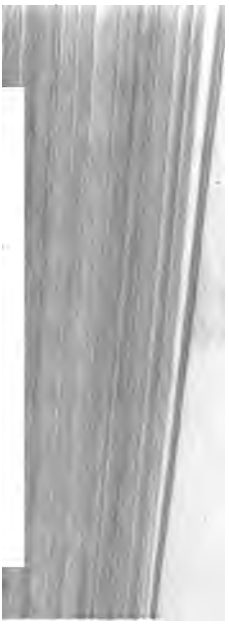
Her face was turned up to his. He felt her soft breath upon his cheek and even through the dim light her great eyes glowed up at him like stars.

For a moment Dick did not answer. The princess saw his broad shoulders rising with each deep breath.

"For the same reason," he answered, "that I have remained—to take care of you. Because I love you, my princess."

"Osborne Pasha!"

The braziers glowed a little brighter. Dick's



princess was almo
that you did!"

"May I sit besi
not wait for her r
princess found him
ders and her quiveri
But still she held he

"I love only you
deep, vibrating voice
nothing but you."

"Dick! But this—
loved! Perhaps you l
own kind—and I am
savage girl of the hills

"Sweetheart, we are
tamed! Whatever you
darling mate——" Th
sity in his voice which ro
nature and brought with
ness that it

while it lasted, sweetheart, but offered to an ideal—which did not exist. Now, I have found my proper mate, darling; is she going to love me in return?"

"Oh, Dick! I love you—love you—love you! You are a man, *my* man, and you are kind and sweet and tender! It is I who am the savage—but I——"

The sentence was never finished, for two strong arms had gathered her close, *yashmac*, *feridjé* and all, and the quivering lips still murmuring inaudibly were crushed to those of the mate allotted to her by the gods of East and West.

"Dick—Dick Pasha——!"

"Yes, darling."

"I have loved only you, since you kissed me in the grape-arbour when we were children, and I had beaten the peasant for killing the chicken!"

He kissed her again. "What a lot of lost time! Never mind, we will not lose much more! We will be married at once, give Karamania our blessing, get Kostovo to give us an Akindschi escort to the frontier and take the Orient Express for Paris!"

"But Dick, dearest, can we be married like that? You are a Christian, and I don't know what I am!" she cried in distress. "We Karamanians are supposed to be part Mohammedan, part pantheist—whatever that may be."

He gave her a laughing kiss. "Then we'll get a Bulgarian bishop and the Patriarch and a Grand



His arms closed
"Poor little prin
that after all she w
The princess nest
"Yes, Dick Pash
not of Karamania."

TH







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